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Iraqi Women's Narratives of Identity and Security: Challenging Dominant Knowledge

A thesis submitted to the University of Warwick for the
degree of Ph.D.

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Declaration

This thesis is entirely my own work. No portion of it has been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

Iraqi Women's Narratives of Identity and Security: Challenging Dominant Knowledge

This thesis examines narratives of Iraqi women in relation to US representations of them and in relation to their experiences of US foreign policy since 2003. Specifically, it asks: How do Iraqi women's narratives disrupt existing knowledge about Muslim women since 9/11? Scholars of Feminist International Relations (IR) have argued that US narratives since 9/11 have represented Muslim women as in need of saving in order to justify the US 'War on Terror', in particular with regards to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Whilst these scholars have sought to deconstruct and oppose this discourse as disempowering to Muslim women, they have often not considered Muslim women's own narratives and how these relate to dominant discourses about them. This serves to reproduce binaries of dominant/subordinate, powerful/powerless that underpin dominant relations of power and hegemonic epistemologies.

This thesis is based on original data in the form of semi-structured interviews with 19 Iraqi women of different religious and class backgrounds, who are predominantly refugees from the conflict in Iraq and based in Jordan. Drawing on postcolonial feminist approaches and Feminist Security Studies, this thesis analyses these interviews as narratives of identity and security. The first substantive chapter considers the degree to which Iraqi women's own narratives relate to US discourses about them. Towards this end, the chapter deploys Stuart Hall's decoding theory and an intersectional approach to reveal that Iraqi women articulate a pluralistic positionality towards the US, premised on a complex relationship that endorses as well as contests elements of their representation. Individual women negotiate multiple positions towards different issues as expressions of their self-identity. Their narratives indicate both resistance and (re)negotiation within a hegemonic framework. This ambivalence disrupts dominant knowledge about Iraqi women yet is unacknowledged in the vast majority of the literature.

The second substantive chapter considers Iraqi women's narratives of their experiences of war, conflict, violence and displacement since 2003. Drawing on Feminist Security Studies and intersectionality, the chapter reveals the central concern of security and how it is constituted by as well as constitutive of self-identity. The chapter emphasizes that self-identity is constructed not only in relation to gender but also class and religious and ethnic background. Therefore, the chapter highlights that there is no unified conceptualization of security, and this differs between women according to

their different self-identities. In this way, the chapter contributes to de-essentializing Muslim women's experiences and disrupting hegemonic knowledge as well as further extending feminist understandings of the links between security and identity.

Overall, this thesis argues for the significance of women's narratives as sources of alternative knowledge production, challenging the binary epistemology and essentializations of dominant knowledge about Muslim women.

List of Abbreviations

UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioners for Refugees
FSS	Feminist Security Studies
IR	International Relations
US	United States
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
Daesh	Al-Dawla al-Islamiyah fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham
IS	Islamic State

Note on Terminology

There are number of terms adopted within this thesis which are potentially contentious but to which there is, at present, no better alternative choice that is widely used and readily understood.

Iraqi women

My use of 'Iraqi women' refers to women with Iraqi citizenship, those who are born in Iraq or to Iraqi parents. In using this term therefore, I wish only to denote women who have experienced life in Iraq and or who at some stage have identified as 'Iraqi'. I shall highlight how each woman relates to Iraq differently and the ways in which she chooses to express her Iraqiness or the absence of it.

Broader Middle East

This is a relatively recent phrase that Özalp (2011) has shown emerged—with synonyms such as Greater Middle East—in the US political lexis following the 9/11 terror attacks. It is problematic because, despite the obvious conflation it imposes on diverse countries and cultures, it has become commonplace. I reluctantly make use of it at points, as it is a recurring term in the representation of Iraqi women.

Daesh

The US State Department has repeatedly amended the term by which they nominate the terror group that formed in Syria and Iraq in recent years: it is variously referred to as the Islamic State (IS), the so-called Islamic State, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and Daesh, the Arabic acronym for Al-Dawla Al-Islamiyah Al-Iraq Al-Sham. I use the latter designation, as it is the term most commonly used by the women I interviewed and also accords with the most recent usage of the US State Department.

Muslim women

This term is hugely problematic, as it has been used by US officials to denote women from the Middle East and beyond. It not only conflates women who are from different countries with distinct cultures, but it has also been used to denote all women from the Middle East, which is grossly inaccurate. I have reluctantly deployed this term in the spirit of tackling the issue of the representation of Muslim women, which is to say, in order to challenge this essentializing category.

Introduction: where are the Iraqi Women?

The academic feminist must learn to learn from them [marginalized women], to speak to them, to suspect that their access to the political and sexual scene is not merely to be corrected by our superior theory and enlightened compassion (Spivak, 1988, p. 135, my emphasis)

The exhortation of prominent postcolonial thinker Gayatri Spivak to ‘speak to [women]’ has been overlooked in feminist scholars’ recent approaches to the representation of Muslim women in US foreign policy narratives since the watershed, epoch-defining events of 9/11. While intense academic scrutiny has been placed on Western perspective of these events and the subsequent geo-political landscape, in which predominantly Muslim countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan have figured so centrally, there has been a noticeable tendency to exclude, or least consciously elide, the views and experiences of those who are often the object of such narratives, especially Muslim women.

In examining how hegemonic authorities have implicitly discussed Muslim women’s security needs in their narratives, the majority of scholars also have made assumptions on their needs and have not considered how these women may themselves perceive US foreign policy, respond to their portrayal, or self-narrate. Once this observation is made, it naturally provokes several questions: why is it necessary to take seriously the narratives of Muslim women? Why should scholars recognise an obligation to ‘speak to’ women not merely ‘speak for’ them? Can the narratives produced by Muslim women themselves challenge dominant knowledge about them? What will these epistemological interventions mean for the field of International Relations (IR) in general and Feminist IR in particular? This study addresses these points and contributes to a shift in the way feminist IR scholars approach the representation of marginalized women.

To begin addressing these critical questions, it is first helpful to establish briefly why the representations of Muslim women in US foreign policy narratives following 9/11 are of importance to feminist scholarship. One of the main motivating factors for academic consideration of this matter is tied to the linguistic focus in Feminist IRs work, which emphasizes the role of language in understanding power relations.

Scholars have observed that since 9/11 women’s rights have occupied a central position in the rhetoric of US foreign policy. Monica Dux and Zora Simic (2008, p. 158) argue the Bush administration ‘attempted to justify the War on Terror as a crusade to spread women’s rights’ with the First Lady Laura Bush declaring that ‘the fight against terrorism is also the fight for the

rights and dignity of women'. The rhetoric of women's rights became inextricable from the slogan of the 'War on Terror'. This produced powerful social effects, as these texts formed what Michael Foucault (1980, p. 131) described as a 'regime of truth', whereby sets of ideas become accepted as objective truth, so that gradually it is perceived as no more than common sense to believe in the language espoused by those perpetuating and authorizing such ideas. In this instance, the Bush administration gained traction for public support by presenting the 'War on Terror' as a campaign not merely with military objectives but also, at least partially, for women's rights. Scholars in response to this rhetoric have been particularly attentive to studying the discursive language of the 'War on Terror':

Although the events of 9/11 are actual happenings in the world, those events do not intrinsically contain their own interpretation. Only through language are such events turned into a full account of that experience. Through language, we name protagonists, ascribe motivations and provide explanation. Through language, we construct a narrative (Hodges, 2011, pp. 3–4).

Scholars—such as Jasmine Zine (2006), Lila Abu Lughod (2002, 2013), Nadia Al-Sajji (2009), and Smeeta Mishra (2007) among others—have focused on the discourse of hegemonic narratives about Muslim women to pin down how the narratives of the Bush administration often represented Muslim women according to gendered or racializing logics that homogenized, victimized or otherwise diminished them. This has revealed a concerted effort to construct a 'saving' narrative behind the US presence in Iraq and Afghanistan (Khalid, 2014, p. 9). As such, scholars argue that this has produced binary oppositions that are gendered, emphasising in particular binaries of a masculinist hero versus feminised victim (see for example Shepherd 2006) and race-ed binaries such as civilized versus uncivilized (see for example Nayak 2006). These binaries have meant the identities of, for example, Afghani and Iraqi women have been collapsed into the singular category of Muslim women, to fit into the 'War on Terror's' narrative of saving women from terrorists and terrorist-sponsoring states.

Scholars argue that these representations are reminiscent of, and in many ways constitute a regressive revival of, historical oriental discourse, as Edward Said (1978) initially identified it in his seminal *Orientalism*. Said argued that the West essentialized the values and cultures of a diverse set of people into a general, primitive category, effectively constructing them in abstract and negative terms in order to bolster the West's position as superior and to maintain power through dominant knowledge about others. Scholars, particularly postcolonial feminist scholars, have drawn on parallels with Said's thesis to argue that since 9/11 US administrations have persistently deployed the tactic of essentialization in their representation of Muslim women and wider foreign policy narratives. They have

demonstrated how this dehumanises Muslim women, rendering them discursive symbols for Western political ambitions, and can in fact be regarded as an act of epistemological violence (Spivak, 1988).

While scholarship that identifies and critiques essentialization and the construction of simplistic, symbolic figureheads within hegemonic narratives is a vital step towards understanding the workings of power relations, it is insufficient on its own. Simply identifying a binary as reductive and false does not in itself dismantle these assumptions or help to humanise those who are its objects.

In identifying binaries, scholars have implicitly made assumptions about Muslim women's agency a solely residing in opposing US foreign policy narratives. I argue, the omission of Muslim women's own narratives and their perspective on their objectification in US narratives serves to recycle hegemonic knowledge, leaving scholars confined to operate within this epistemological framework. In effect, such an approach discounts Muslim women's agency and erases their plurality of experience and identity.

The prioritization of studying dominant knowledge has led feminist IR scholars to produce partial knowledge about US discourse on Muslim women, as we are only left with the scholars' position on the subject.

Standpoint Feminist Theory Approach: Contributions to the field of Feminist IR and Feminist Security Studies

The work in this thesis is situated within the field of Feminist IR and in particular will build on the contributions from those scholars who have engaged with standpoint feminist theory to challenge the common assumptions in IR. Feminist IR scholars have attempted to respond to masculinist and realist approaches in the field of IR which have otherwise ignored women's perspectives and experiences. Jill Steans explains that standpoint theory serves as a more general challenge mainstream IR's positivist approach to knowledge, as traditional IR scholars regard 'fact' as objective truth. This leads to the marginalization of other ways of interpreting the world: 'understanding' and 'explaining' International Relations have been constructed in ways that delimit the scope of 'legitimate' study in the field (Steans, 2006, p. 20). According to Susan Hekman:

Standpoint theory constituted a challenge to the masculinist definition of truth and method embodied in modern Western science and epistemology. It established an alternative version of truth and,

with it, hope for a less repressive society (Susan Hekman, 1997, p. 356).

Hekman's point about the significance of feminist standpoint theory in challenging dominant masculinist definition of truth can be seen in J. Ann Tickner's work, who has adopted a feminist standpoint theory approach. Tickner tackles IR's lack of engagement with feminist perspectives by encouraging IR scholars to take gender as a category of analysis seriously and to acknowledge the feminist standpoint in IR (Tickner, 1992, pp.17-19). Although it is important to include gender analysis and a feminist standpoint in IR, my thesis will also be mindful of other social categories, such as race and class, by engaging with the concept of intersectionality developed by Patricia Hill-Collins and Kimberle Crenshaw. The thesis will also include postcolonial thinkers' discussions about the inclusion of non-Western knowledge to guard against Western-centric perspectives.

Feminist scholars such as Cynthia Enloe and J. Ann Tickner have previously attempted to rectify the marginalization of different ways of interpreting IR by encouraging students and scholars to 'make feminist sense of international politics' (Enloe, 1989 and Tickner, 1992). This was in order to advocate the inclusion of women's experiences as valid perspectives of international politics. Enloe usefully developed the conceptual tool of 'feminist curiosity' to help scholars ask questions which leads us to uncover women's experiences and uncommon knowledge:

What is distinctive about developing a feminist curiosity? One of the starting points of feminism is taking women's lives seriously. "Seriously" implies listening carefully, digging deep, developing a long attention span, being ready to be surprised. Taking women—all sorts of women, in disparate times and places—seriously is not the same thing as valorizing women. Many women, of course, deserve praise, even awe; but many women we need to take seriously may appear too complicit in violence or in the oppression of others, or too cozily wrapped up in their relative privilege to inspire praise or compassion (Enloe, 2004, pp. 3–4).

By adopting a 'feminist curiosity' approach, she has crucially pointed to the ways in which women are omnipresent in International Relations and how considering women's experiences can offer a rich insight into what happens 'behind the curtains' in international politics. This includes, for example, the experiences of diplomat's wives and sex workers outside military bases. Thus, my study will be inspired by 'feminist curiosity' in order to explore and learn from the experiences of ordinary women regarding the workings of international politics in considerable depth.

Standpoint feminist scholars, such as Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway, and Dorothy Smith, amongst others, argue that knowledge needs to be socially situated in order to move away from abstraction towards humanizing experiences of women (Harding, 1987, Haraway 1988, Smith, 1990). Thus, a standpoint feminist approach teaches us to learn from the women who have been the object of hegemonic narratives in order to circumscribe, and indeed anchor, the claims that scholars may make to better highlight marginalized women's pluralistic experiences and to add complexity to the ways in which we understand hegemonic representations.

It is important to note that standpoint feminist theory is more than just an exercise in highlighting women's experiences; it also treats women's situated knowledge as a form of agency and has the mechanisms to help us better understand power relations as, according to Hill-Collins, standpoint feminist theory is an "interpretive framework dedicated to explicating how knowledge remains central to maintaining and changing unjust systems of power [...] such theory exists primarily to explicate these power relations. Thus, attempts to take the knowledge while leaving the power behind inadvertently operate within the terrain of privileged knowledge." (Collins, 1997, pp. 375-381). The project will treat situated knowledge as alternative knowledge. The term 'alternative' in this context means differing from dominant knowledge, and is used in this thesis as a way to compare, contrast and challenge the singularity and authority of hegemonic knowledge. I further use the terms hegemonic knowledge and dominant knowledge interchangeably to mean knowledge which comes to be considered as common sense and serves the interest of the powerful (Gramsci, 1971).

I will draw upon feminist standpoint theory and build upon the work of feminist IR scholars such as Cynthia Enloe, J. Ann Tickner and Cynthia Cockburn, amongst others, who treat women's lives as a form of situated knowledge. Standpoint theory is important to my thesis as it will enable me to privilege Iraqi women's experiences as a form of situated knowledge with regards to US foreign policy, thereby challenging US-centric knowledge through IR. My project will access women's experiences through their narratives of war, violence, security and identity in the post-2003 period. I argue that Iraqi women's narratives constitute a form of alternative knowledge about international politics that disrupts hegemonic/dominant knowledge.

I focus on discussing the value of situated knowledge in order to better understand power relations from the perspectives of the subjugated in **Chapter Four**. In particular, I will deploy "decoding theory" to help in theorizing women's multiple positionalities in relation to US foreign policy narratives. Decoding theory captures the nuances within women's narratives and experiences that allow us to understand the relationship between Iraqi women and US foreign policy narrative in a detailed manner. Alongside

decoding theory, I deploy the concept of Occidentalism to help us understand how women's decoding positionalities can challenge and complicate the reductive Orientalist 'us versus them' approach. In this way, the chapter demonstrates how women's narratives produce knowledge that challenges the powerful versus powerless dichotomy, thus complicating power dynamics. This points to the value of situated knowledge in complicating our understanding of power dynamics.

In **Chapter Five**, I problematize how mainstream Feminist IR and Feminist Security Studies have often privileged the assumption that gender is the most significant aspect of women's experiences of war and violence. To this end, I deploy feminist standpoint theory in combination with intersectionality theory to enable us to explore how women's experiences are constituted by other social inequalities and differences, such as class, nationality, and religion, as have been produced over time as a result of the Iraqi's regime policies and post-invasion political dynamics. Thus, this chapter demonstrates that the categorization of 'gender' or 'woman' is not monolithic in this context (Carby, 1982; Butler, 1999) and should not be regarded as a single entity forming the shared experiences and meanings of security amongst women. Specifically, the chapter highlights the multiple meanings of security for Iraqi women and these meanings are mutually constituted in relation to their respective identities, which, in turn, are constructed in relation to multiple axes of identity. I therefore confirm and extend Maria Stern's (2005) work on the relationship between identity and security to the Iraq case, highlighting the utility of intersectionality in this regard.

More generally, this thesis highlights the fact that Iraqi women's alternative knowledge is a form of agency and that feminist IR scholars, or indeed feminist security studies scholars, should not capture stories of women's victimhood but understand that their situated knowledge (alternative knowledge) is empowering. As Dorothy Smith (1987) explains, women who vocalise their struggles and victories can "raise consciousness".

Iraqi women's security narratives: why does it matter?

The importance of understanding Iraqi women security narratives and situations can be clarified as follows: although the meta-narrative of the 'War on Terror' affected all Muslims regardless of geography, the US at the same time targeted particular countries for intervention. One of these was Iraq, and US narratives have specifically instrumentalized Iraqi women to justify the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. After Bush launched the 'War on Terror' he categorised Iraq as part of what he termed 'the axis of evil'

(Dimitrova et al., p. 23) denoting countries allegedly engaged in acts of terrorism and/or in possession of weapons of mass destruction. Women's rights were co-opted as one of the core pillars of Bush's flagship policy, the Freedom Agenda, which was aimed at bringing democracy to the Middle East and combatting terrorism. The Bush administration made this particularly apparent in their remarks on and representation of Iraqi women, whom they sought to render symbolic of these values of freedom and civilization. The Bush administration enacted an explicit binding of the Freedom Agenda with women's rights by funding various organisations and initiatives for women in the Middle East, most prominently in Iraq (Hassan, 2014, p. 128). These included the Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative and the US-Iraq Women's Network (Office of the senior coordinator for international women's issues, 2005). Such prominent multi-million-dollar initiatives were widely regarded as indicative of how important women's rights were to Bush's foreign policy and his freedom agenda (Hassan, 2014, p. 126).

In addition, on the one hand, US foreign policy narratives have effectively made the claim that Iraqi women needed saving from Saddam Hussein as he was their source of insecurity; on the other, the research that deals with these narratives has to date focussed on demonstrating how Muslim women did not need saving from the US, as postcolonial scholars take the view that the idea of Western intervention is patronizing and can in itself result in considerable violence. Both scholars and US officials made these claims without researching Iraqi women's historical context in any real detail or from the position of having a deep understanding of what security actually means to women in Iraq. *My project is concerned with exploring the question of security with those who have been left out of discussions concerning their 'saving'.*

It is important to note that the concept of 'security' is contested in IR. Traditionally, discussions of security in IR tend to revolve around issues of peace and war or sovereign power, which assumes that the state protects its subjects from foreign threats. Feminist IR scholars have questioned this definition and argued that the state is rather a source of insecurity for women. For example, V. Spike Peterson problematized the state and its role as protector of its citizens, arguing that the state is responsible for allowing women to become: "the objects of masculinist social control not only through direct violence (murder, rape, battering, incest), but also through ideological constructs, such as 'women's work' and the cult of motherhood, that justify structural violence—inadequate health care, sexual harassment, and sex-segregated wages, rights and resources" (Peterson, 1992c, 46). Similarly, Tickner argues for a widening of the concept of security beyond "the direct violence of war" to also include the "insecurity of individuals

whose life expectancy was reduced [] by domestic and international structures of political and economic oppression” (Tickner 1992, 69).

A particular concept of security that offers a different approach to traditional notions of security is that of human security, as being: “Contrary to the state centric security framework, which both endangers people and ignores the real threats to individuals” (McCormack, 2008, p. 113). However, Feminist scholars, such as Wenona Gile, Jennifer Hyndman and Heidi Hudson, have also been critical of human security for being gender blind. (Wenona Giles & Jennifer Hyndman, 2004, Hudson, 2005). In addition, Hudson raised the issue that human security’s universalizing tendencies means that it also neglects cultural differences:

The security needs of Western women and women in the developing world are different to the extent that no global sisterhood can be assumed. In response to such universalizing tendencies, African women have begun to reassert their own brands of feminism and/or womanism (Heidi Hudson, 2005, p.157).

This project will respond to this concern by developing the concept of security and will highlight the need for a contextualized security that incorporates an intersectional approach and emphasizes the importance of standpoint theory in foregrounding Iraqi women’s own definitions of security.

I observed that each Iraqi woman I interviewed expressed ideas of what it means to feel secure, and often in ways that were based on their particular experiences and social backgrounds. The aim of my fieldwork is to uncover the multiple ways in which Iraqi women narrate their experiences and may relate to hegemonic representations of themselves in order to avoid essentializing women’s experiences and generating generic understandings of their identities. I have found the works of Annick Wibben (2011) and Maria Stern (2005), regarding the links between women’s identities, securities, and insecurities, to be particularly useful to my understanding of the narratives of the women whom I interviewed.

It is important to note that there are studies which have specifically studied the lives of Iraqi women under the 2003 US occupation of Iraq (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009, Enloe, 2010). There are also a number of studies which have examined the role of Iraqi women’s activism in Iraq’s past and present, including post the 2003 invasion (Efrati, 2012; Al Ali, 2007). Examples of authors who focus on Iraqi women’s security situation include Yasmin Al Jawaheri (2012), who has carried out empirical work on Iraqi women from different socio-economic backgrounds in order to study the impact of international economic sanctions on their lives. More recent studies include those carried out by Lisa Davis (2016a, 2016b), who has conducted a

contextual analysis on gender-based violence with the emergence of ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). These important works have contributed to our understanding of the complexities of Iraqi women's experiences of conflict, hardship and empowerment.

However, none of these studies actually offer a systematic analysis of Iraqi women's responses to their portrayal in US narratives since 9/11; also missing from this corpus is the theorisation of women's experiences and tackling of epistemological questions, such as: how do we build an alternative common sense to what has been said about Iraqi women in US narratives? How should we approach the question of their agency? The importance of thinking about these theories and approaches does not merely serve to benefit the present study exclusively but could also be of broader enduring value for research areas interested in developing a deeper understanding of women's agency. Such theories are generally transferable and serve as fundamentally important conceptual tools for scholars who adopt a feminist methodology.

Overview of women's situation in Iraq

The interviewees have not only referenced the 2003 US invasion in their own narratives but also have pointed to the significance of longer-term national and historical processes. Thus, in order to fully appreciate their narratives about their post-conflict security situation and attitude towards US foreign policy narratives, it is necessary to contextualize their narratives in relation to wider national and historical processes as well as US foreign policies. Towards this end, I will provide an historical overview of Iraqi women's relationship with the state as well as to the relevant policies of the Bush and Obama administrations.

In developing this overview, I first cover the period of the Ba'ath party which came to power in 1968. I then discuss the period of the Bush administration's (2003–2008) involvement with women's rights in Iraq and also the Obama administration's (2008–2016) policies in this regard. Importantly, I also cover the rise of Daesh (also known as the Islamic State, see Note on Terminology). I have focused on Ba'ath's rule as a starting point, because it forms the earliest reference point in Iraq's history for the participants interviewed in this work.

Iraqi women under the Ba'ath Party from 1968–2003

The Ba'ath Party, which ruled Iraq from 1968–2003, is generally considered a secular Arab socialist political party. It was first led by Ahmed Hassan Al-Bakr and subsequently by Saddam Hussein from 1979 until his toppling in 2003. From the early 1970s until the early 1980s, Iraq experienced an economic boom resulting from the rise of oil prices. As a result, the Ba'ath

Party worked on developing the country and took the decision to introduce policies which benefited women:

While the other oil-producing Gulf countries started to look for workers outside their national boundaries, the Iraqi government mainly tried to tap into the country's own human resources: women. Less motivated by egalitarian principles than by pragmatic economic calculations, the Iraqi government encouraged women to get an education and become part of the labor force (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009, p. 31).

Thus, the Ba'ath party was invested in the idea of 'state feminism' for pragmatic reasons. Regardless of motivation, these policies still worked to empower some women. The Ba'ath party's ideas of empowerment did not just operate on the level of rhetoric, but rather they passed legislation to ensure that women improved their rates of literacy and were furthermore, in practice, encouraged to enter the workforce: 'in 1974 a government decree stipulated that all university graduates—men or women—would be employed automatically. Subsequently, working outside the home became for women not only acceptable but prestigious and normative' (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009, p. 31).

The Ba'ath party also implemented progressive civil laws that not only focused on improving education and work opportunities for women but also on improving other aspects of their lives: 'The Iraqi Provisional Constitution (drafted in 1970) formally guaranteed equal rights to women and other laws specifically ensured their right to vote, attend school, run for political office, and own property' (Human Rights Watch Report, 2003). Thus, because of this progressive civil law, in the 1960s and 1970s Iraqi women were regarded as among the most educated in the region, and accordingly often held high professional status.

While there were progressive state policies in place, the Ba'ath party also implemented regressive policies which targeted minority groups. Before delving into an example of how these regressive laws led to violence, for example as perpetrated by the Ba'ath party against people from minority backgrounds including women, it is essential to highlight the heterogeneity of Iraq's ethno-religious makeup and the different relationships formed between current and past governments of Iraq and distinct ethno-religious groups, and vice versa. The estimated religious and ethnic breakdown of Iraq is as follows:

The three largest demographic groups are Shi'a Arabs, Sunni Arabs and Kurds, most of whom adhere to Sunni Islam. [...] 99 per cent of Iraqis are Muslim, of which 60-65 per cent are Shi'a and 32-37 per cent are Sunni. [...] In terms of ethnicity [...] Ethnic minorities

include Turkmen, Shabak, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Armenians, black Iraqis and Roma. Some Yezidis consider themselves a distinct ethnic group, while others identify as being Kurds (Minority Rights Group International, 2017).

Despite Iraq's diverse religious-ethnic population, the Ba'ath party sought to impose a predominantly Sunni vision of the 'Iraqi past' (Davis, 2005). This ignored other sectarian histories such as, notably, those of the Shias or the Kurds. These ideas, again, did not exclusively operate on the level of rhetoric. In fact, the Ba'ath party carried out Arabization campaigns which devastated minority populations in Iraq on many levels. A notable example of this is Saddam Hussein's brutal ethnic cleansing programme which sought to target Kurds: 'Between 1986 and 1989, in the midst of the Iran-Iraq War, Hussein carried out the genocidal Anfal campaign against Iraq's Kurds, culminating in a chemical attack on the civilian population of Halabja in 1988' (Minority Rights Group International, 2017). This demonstrates that although the Ba'ath party's official line on women's rights was oriented to improve their living conditions, the state failed to protect women from particular minority backgrounds such as Kurds. These Arabization campaigns begun in the 1960s (Ihsan, 2017, p. 26), around the same time as the Ba'ath party implemented progressive laws which sought to empower women. This fact strongly suggests that a study which only focuses on gender analysis will lack the necessary tools to understand the situation of women from different social and ethnic/religious backgrounds, which could lead to a reductive narrative with respect to the history and experiences of Iraqi women.

It was not just the state that caused a degradation of women and minority group's living conditions. International organizations also contributed to the declining social and economic situation in Iraq by imposing international economic sanctions. These were introduced by the United Nations Security Council in 1990 following the first Gulf war, and the measures affected women differently to their male counterparts:

Levels of unemployment and food insecurity rose. As time wore on, women bore the brunt of sustained decreasing education spending in terms of their literacy, education, and employment. Currently, the illiteracy rate of Iraqi women is twice as high as that of men (UNDP, 2011, p. 9).

Yet, the Bush administration famously blamed the deteriorating conditions of Iraqi women solely on Saddam Hussein. Scholars such as Yasmin Al Jawaheri, who conducted a study of Iraqi women's experiences under international sanctions, has argued that the assertion that the US was 'saving women' from Saddam Hussein, [...] operates to erase the impact of

many years of international sanctions, which impoverished Iraqis' (Al Jawaheri, 2008, p. 77).

Iraqi women under the Bush administration from 2003–2008

The Bush administration responded to the attacks on the twin towers on September 11th, 2001 by invading Iraq in 2003. Part of the justification the Bush administration claimed for going to war with Iraq was to save Iraqi women from the brutal dictator Saddam Hussein and to introduce democracy. As Hester Eisenstein (2010, p. 424) notes, 'the liberation of women was self-evidently part of the project of modernisation and democratisation claimed by the Bush administration as it brutally reshaped the landscape of Afghanistan and Iraq'. The Bush administration's interest in women's rights and their foreign policy's emphasis on 'saving' women in the Broader Middle East has perplexed some scholars such as Christina Ho, who comments that 'the sudden concern for women has come from neo-conservatives like George W. Bush, who are not known for their support for feminism. Yet feminism is 'essential' to the War on Terror [...] enabling Islamic societies to be condemned as 'uniquely oppressive to women' (Ho, 2010, p. 1). Ho argues that the US adopted feminist principles to justify military intervention as a rescue mission for victimized women: 'protecting the rights of women became the most politically powerful rationale for invading Afghanistan' (Ho, 2010, p. 2). Andrea G. Bottner, Director of the Office of International Women's Issues, encapsulated just such a narrative at the end of the Bush administration's tenure, in late 2008:

We have learned the type of society envisioned by extremists, and know that when women's voices are silenced, the consequences are tragic. After September 11th, the United States was faced with a whole new sort of war – a war against extremists who battle on many fronts (Bottner, US State Department, 2008).

Bottner presents the marginalization or oppression of women as inextricable from the extremist enemies the US faces in a post-9/11 world. She thereby establishes that for the US to emerge triumphant in its foreign policy, it must champion women's freedoms.

Indeed, the Bush administration established that 'introducing' democracy to Iraq would make women feel more secure. Their democracy initiatives were almost uniformly American in ethos and style: 'grants were given to NGOs to carry out democracy education, leadership training, political training, NGO coalition building, organisational management, media training, and, that all important pillar of US-style democracy, 'teaching entrepreneurship'' (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009, p. 63).

While the Bush administration was fixated on their democratic aims, they failed to acknowledge that the living conditions and security of Iraqi women did not improve. In fact, women's conditions in Iraq sharply declined after the Bush administration invaded Iraq in 2003: 'undeniably, the biggest challenge facing Iraqi women in 2013 [was] the lack of security coupled with the lack of rule of law, both contributing to increasing and wide-ranging forms of gender-based violence' (Al-Ali, 2013, p. 1). For example, 'honour' killings rose following the 2003 invasion of Iraq: 'the southern city of Basra experienced a seventy percent increase in 'honour' killings between 2004 and 2008' (Davis, 2016a, pp. 116-117). Shockingly, these figures may in fact underestimate aspects of the reality: 'Tellingly, more than 97% of women in one survey stated that they would not be willing to report gender-based violence to the police because of 'fear of damaging their reputation' or the belief that Iraq's law enforcement agencies would be unable to solve the problem' (Davis, 2016a, p. 111).

The US launched democracy initiatives in Iraq which produced mixed results, with respect to voting and political participation. Certain outcomes contradicted the US's goal of liberating all women and bringing progress to Iraq. The US desired democracy for Iraq, but, in reality, the progressive civil laws that were once protected under the Ba'ath rule became under attack:

In 2004, as the CPA-backed Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) was drafting a Transitional Administrative Law for the country, women's rights advocates demanded a female quota of 40 percent in the Iraqi parliament and the abolition of the proposed Resolution 137, which would rely exclusively on Shari'a for personal status issues. The CPA ultimately granted women a 25 percent parliamentary quota that year, which was considered a good start. However, many of the women who have gained seats in the parliament are conservative and have not attempted to push for change. Instead, they follow instructions from their party leaders and tend to vote against the expansion of women's rights (Ahmed, 2010, p. 160).

This also highlights the division and tensions between secular and Islamist women as these outcomes have empowered Islamist women who support Islamic conservatism. This has put secular women at a loss (Al-Ali & Pratt 2009, p. 79).

Meanwhile, the outcomes of parliamentary quota have had a positive impact on the Kurds as they were able to gain more independence and exercise autonomy: 'The two Kurdish parties, which for decades had been rivals for political influence in northern Iraq, joined together in early 2005 in a parliamentary coalition, the Kurdistan Alliance' (Enloe, 2010, p. 93).

Adding to the complexity of the US intervention, Sunnis who were favoured by the old regime were displaced by the US-favoured Shia-led government. As Sunni dominance withered, sectarian tensions became aggravated (Hagen et al., 2015, p. 158). This dynamic thus complicates the way in which scholars should interpret sectarian tensions as not necessarily resulting from the emergence of Daesh.

Iraqi women under the Obama administration from 2008–2016

There are very few studies which have examined the Obama administration's rhetoric and policies towards women. The systematic, sustained instrumentalization of Iraqi women underpinned much of US foreign policy in this period, across two separate administrations; exploring how Iraqi women themselves conceived of this is a necessary. It is an overdue step in developing a better sense of the degree to which women diverge or converge with these US narratives and military action.

The centrality of women's rights in US foreign policy was maintained by Bush's successor Obama, who pronounced that 'promoting gender equality and advancing the status of women and girls around the world is vital to achieving our overall foreign policy objectives' (Obama, 2013). Yet, this policy fell short when it came to Iraq—the Obama administration sought to distance itself from the Bush administration's legacy and opted to discard democracy-building in Iraq. The Obama administration has distanced itself for most of its tenure from anything synonymous with Iraq, including Iraqi women. The absence of the 'saving' narrative is striking; from his investiture onwards, Obama presided over a resolute silence on Iraqi women, in complete contrast with the previous administration (see Al-Ali & Pratt, 2011). The marked difference from the narrative of the Bush administration is evident in Obama's 2010 official address to end the combat mission in Iraq. There was not a single mention of Iraqi women or a hint of any possible policy extension regarding women's rights: 'so tonight, I am announcing that the American combat mission in Iraq has ended. Operation Iraqi Freedom is over, and the Iraqi people now have lead responsibility for the security of their country' (Obama, The White House, 2010).

Obama thus presided over a foreign policy narrative that was in flux. His administration strove to disassociate itself from the Iraqi war. Central to this was the discarding of Iraqi women from the narrative. The emergence of Daesh irrevocably changed this, however. Thus, due to the rise of Daesh, the Obama administration sought to rationalize the return of military intervention. They did so by providing 'protection' for women from Daesh, through military air strikes, choosing not to have on the ground military presence in Iraq. The Obama administration then restored Iraqi women to

their foreign policy narrative as victims in need of saving, this time from Daesh.

The Obama administration focused on linking sexual violence with the rise of Daesh. Malinowski spoke of Daesh's impact on the women of Iraq in charged, sexualized language: 'it has kidnapped thousands of women belonging to other religious sects, taking them not simply as hostages, but as commodities, spoils of war to be raped or sold as slaves' (Malinowski, US State Department, 2014a). Malinowski elsewhere reiterated the idea that Iraqi women were victims of brutal sexual violence: 'women and girls as young as 12 or 13 have been taken captive, to be sold as sex slaves or put into forced marriages with ISIL fighters' (Malinowski, US State Department, 2014b).

This narrative ignored the important issue of how gender-based violence had existed pre-Daesh and even pre-invasion. As Nadjé Al-Ali has argued:

sexual violence, as we are witnessing now, did not emerge in a vacuum but Iraqi women and men have been confronted with sexual and broader gender-based violence pre-invasion Iraq and, as well as in the post-invasion period. Without wanting to belittle the carnage and cruelties committed by ISIS, I have felt uneasy about the limited interest displayed by the media, policy makers and the general public with respect to the broad continuum of sexual and gender-based violence in present day Iraq, but also prior to the appearance of ISIS in Iraq (Al-Ali, 2016, p. 2).

However, sexual violence and sectarian violence have escalated with the emergence of Daesh:

In 2014, as Iraq was undergoing a steady rise in sectarian violence, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) took control of several major cities [...] they immediately imposed their extremist agenda directly on the bodies of women, ordering them to fully cover themselves and stay at home. Within days, credible reports began emerging of ISIL fighters abducting and raping women (Davis, 2016a, p. 102).

It was not just direct sexual violence that women experienced under Daesh but other forms of violence and control too. For example, Daesh attempted to install an Islamic system which sought to control women's bodies by imposing very strict dress codes—any women who opposed such laws were then met with physical violence:

Under the militia's enforcement of a strict and misguided interpretation of sharia law, ISIL has subjected women to stoning,

lashings, and beatings with sticks for having their hair or faces uncovered, or for not otherwise adhering to a strict interpretation of Islamic dress code (Davis, 2016b, p. 1175).

Forced migration

The conflict has displaced millions of Iraqis. Even before the rise of Daesh, it was reported in 2007 that one in six Iraqis were displaced:

There are now two million internally displaced Iraqis and 2.2 million refugees, mostly in neighbouring states. (Forced Migration Review, 2007, p. 3).

The emergence of Daesh worsened the refugee situation and the numbers of displaced people in Iraq. Some Iraqi women and men managed to escape the conflict and conditions of Daesh by seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. Recent estimates suggest that: ‘as of 2016, there were more than 3 million Iraqis displaced within Iraq and another 264,000 registered as refugees in the region’ (Kvittingen et al., 2018, p. 2). Of those Iraqis who fled to Jordan as of 2010, ‘estimates of the Iraqi refugee population in Jordan range from 500,000 to 750,000, representing approximately 8–10 percent of Iraq’s population’ (Al-Qdah & Lacroix, 2010, p. 523). Many Iraqi refugees have resided in Jordan. For this reason, I have chosen Jordan as the main fieldwork site for undertaking my research.

It is widely acknowledged in human rights policy circles that the conditions of Iraqi refugees in Jordan are not necessarily pleasant. This is largely due to the fact that Jordan does not recognize Iraqis as having refugee status, which hinders them from having a stable life:

persons registered with UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees], including Iraqis, would be designated as asylum seekers rather than given prima facie refugee status [...]. As such, Iraqis are considered guests or visitors in Jordan, and there are no specific policies to deal with their needs, nor are there plans to put policies in place to integrate them in the long term (Al-Qdah & Lacroix, 2010, p. 528).

Even after escaping war and hardship, Iraqi women often continue to encounter severe issues. In this case, these issues stem almost exclusively from not being allowed to integrate into Jordanian society. This situation demonstrates that Iraqi women’s experience of violence and conflict should be considered in relation to a continuum: ‘By understanding conflict as a continuum, instead of as an expression of a particular form of mass violence in the context of war, we can recognize that human rights violations persist

outside of, and are magnified by, conflict, instead of being created by it' (Davis, 2016a, p. 106).

This summary of women's situation in Iraq and as refugees demonstrates the multiple and varying influences on Iraqi women's experiences. This begs the question of the meaning of security for Iraqi women and the degree to which this may be different from the meaning of security articulated in US foreign policy. There is a need to avoid generalizing the experiences of Iraqi women and instead highlight difference in social identities, such as religion and ethnicity in women's experiences of (post-) conflict and security need

Outline of chapters

Chapter One: Making feminist sense of the 'War on Terror'

Chapter One begins by providing an overview of the literature on the US representation of Muslim women since 9/11. It argues that most postcolonial feminists have demonstrated how the raced and gendered dimensions of the 'War on Terror' served to justify the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. This consensus points to the importance of the study of representation to the field of IR in terms of understanding how discourses produce, for example, gendered and racial inequalities. Despite this, IR scholars have paid little attention to these dimensions due to their reliance on positivist methodologies that do not allow them to recognise the importance of language and representation in identifying power imbalances in knowledge production. I then elucidate more detailed examples of tropes and themes assigned to Muslim women via US foreign policy and demonstrate that while scholars have identified that US discourses about Muslim women were raced and gendered, they have excluded Muslim women's responses to their representation. I argue that this is also due to the limitations inherent to these scholars' methodologies. I demonstrate that postcolonial feminists' over-reliance on the framework of Edward Said's (1979) key text, *Orientalism*, has led them to largely neglect the lived experiences of the women in question. This methodological oversight has led me to formulate my research questions around the need to include Muslim women's narratives as a source of alternative knowledge in order to disrupt dominant knowledge and highlight their agency. My study focusses on the case of Iraqi women but makes the claim that the underlying research has implications for the ways in which we approach the representation of marginalized women in general.

I offer an overview of the relevant Feminist Security Studies literature and discuss the issue of security, as the latter is a unifying concern amongst the interviewees. In particular, I discuss how Feminist IR and Security Studies are important to enriching empirical research. I do this by examining the importance of women's experiences to the understanding of global politics,

highlighting how feminist scholarship has shifted the ontology of IR/security studies to include women's security, including bodily integrity, the injustice of gendered hierarchies at the interpersonal, national and international levels, and the particular gendered ways in which women are impacted by conflict, through referencing work by Cynthia Enloe and Ann Tickner, among other prominent feminist scholars. I highlight how my project emphasizes that the concept of human security should not only include the category of gender but also considers the inclusion of intersectionality as a way to better contextualize security. I will also argue that standpoint theory will help us highlight marginalized knowledge as matter of international security.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework: Feminist Standpoint Theory approach

This chapter provides an overview of the study's theoretical framework. The thesis draws on standpoint feminist theory as a means of understanding women's narratives as a form of situated knowledge about International Relations. It discusses how central feminist standpoint theory enables me to address the project's aim of producing alternative knowledge in order to highlight the interviewees' agency and disruptions of US hegemonic knowledge about Muslim women. It also discusses how standpoint theory relates to other concepts in this project, such as 'disruption' and 'agency', in order to conceptualise the significance of women's narratives in relation to dominant knowledge. It will also discuss how the project will overcome any risk of essentialism from a sole reliance on feminist standpoint theory by further drawing on the postcolonial and intersectional approaches.

Chapter Three: Data Collection and Methods

This chapter discusses the collection of primary data for the thesis, which consists of 19 interviews that I carried out with some of the most marginalized Iraqi female refugees in Jordan. I add an interview to this corpus which I conducted with an Iraqi woman who still resides in Iraq. The collation of these interviews is central to exploring my thesis's research questions with regards to the ways in which Iraqi women's narratives disrupt dominant knowledge. I detail my experiences in the field and what that entailed; namely, how I was able to gain access to some of the most marginalized Iraqi refugees living in Jordan. I also discuss how I aimed to capture a diverse sample, which has allowed me to achieve the project's goal of offering a pluralistic account of Iraqi women's experiences.

I argue that Iraqi women's experiences are best understood through a narrative approach. I therefore describe the kind of narrative analysis that was used and how this approach enables me to examine Iraqi women's

positionalities in relation to US hegemonic narratives, as well to understand the interviewees' identities and security.

I lastly reflect on the challenges of researching marginalized women, of 'giving voice to women' and the problems of understanding this voice. I elaborate on how I sought to overcome the limitations of translation and of carrying out empirical research by acknowledging the power dynamic between the researcher and researched, and adopting a feminist ethic of self-reflexivity (considering, for example, Sandra Harding's work on objectivity). I also address how my project sought to assume an interpretivist ontological direction to adhere to Harding's objectivity, which further supports the project's stance of adopting a sceptical view of 'facts'.

Chapter Four: Iraqi women's attitudes towards US foreign policy narratives

My main research question asks: *How do Iraqi women's narratives disrupt existing hegemonic knowledge about representations and experiences of Muslim women?* Therefore, Chapter Four provides an analysis of Iraqi women's own narratives in response to US, and indeed other, foreign policy narratives. The primary purpose is to capture Iraqi women's diverse positionalities, and in doing so demonstrate how their narratives constitute an alternative knowledge. This chapter also demonstrates how feminist standpoint theory, as the project underpinning, has helped me to study power relations from the perspective of Iraqi women in a complex manner, and that I was able to reveal the extent to which the interviewees have confirmed, negotiated, or opposed US hegemonic knowledge about them in order to demonstrate the degree to which their narratives disrupt US hegemonic knowledge about Muslim women generally. In doing so, I make a case for the importance of adopting a standpoint feminist approach.

In order to contextualise the interviewees' narratives, I have provided an overview of US hegemonic narratives of the Bush and Obama administrations.

I then detail how Stuart Hall's decoding theory—which includes the concept of the hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional positions—enabled the study of women's positionality in relation to US foreign policy narratives with considerable degrees of complexity and nuance. This facilitated my goal of offering a pluralistic account of women's voices. I discuss the concept of Occidentalism as a supplement to decoding theory in order to demonstrate, for example, that even a hegemonic position is an agential position which by definition challenges binary oppositions such as 'us versus them', 'powerful versus powerless', etc. This finding will provoke feminist IR scholars to re-evaluate their approach of prioritising hegemonic knowledge in order to understand power relations. This also allowed me to address the subsidiary

research question: *How do Iraqi women relate to US foreign policy narratives and representations of Iraqi women?*

The key finding of this chapter is that Iraqi women's narratives disrupt hegemonic US narratives, and indeed postcolonial feminist critiques of US narratives, because of the different ways in which Iraqi women position themselves in relation to US narratives. Moreover, the relationship between different positionalities and agency is more complex than the terms hegemonic, oppositional, or negotiated otherwise suggest. There is thus the need to recognize personal circumstances and to resist categorization of women. This need has not always been met in the literature dealing with US representations of Muslim women since 9/11.

Chapter Five: Iraqi women's narratives of the violence and conflict in Iraq since 2003

The previous chapter pointed to the importance of insecurity in shaping the narratives of the women that I interviewed. In Chapter Four, I build upon arguments made by Feminist Security Studies scholars for the need to reconceptualize security. However, instead of working on encompassing more gendered dimensions to security, I argue that we must instead pay attention to context and other social axes as well as recognize more agency in their narratives. The chapter highlights the importance of feminist standpoint theory in facilitating this goal by enabling us to be more attentive to the life-grounded experiences of Iraqi women. I also discuss the importance of complicating the concept of agency in relation to security by adopting a standpoint epistemology.

In doing so, I address the secondary research question: *How do narratives of Iraqi women reveal the relationship between security and identity?*

Inspired by the works of Maria Stern (2005) and Annick Wibben (2011) on the relationship between identity and security, I examine women's perceptions of security. In doing so, I illuminate the mutually constitutive and complex relationship between identities and different types of insecurities, namely in relation to personal security, economic security and community security. My work builds specifically on the work of Wibben and Stern, who argued that there is a mutually constitutive relationship between identity and security. My thesis extends their argument by complicating the idea of agency in relation to security. For example, Iraqi women's narratives complicate the meaning of agency and security in relation to women's freedoms, as many view communal security as indivisible from personal security.

Conclusion: Reflection and Implications

In the conclusion, I discuss how the previous chapters support the overarching argument that highlighting the significance of women's narratives as sources of alternative knowledge production is vital to challenging the binary epistemology and essentialization of dominant knowledge about Muslim women. In particular, my project identifies a number of methodological and epistemological gaps in how scholars study the representation of Muslim women and their agency. I detail how a methodological approach of narrative analysis, and standpoint theory as my epistemological approach, in addition to micro-level theories of decoding theory, Orientalism, as well as the concepts of security and intersectionality, can redress these gaps. This chapter concludes by connecting the findings of the research to areas of contribution in the field of IR, specifically those of Feminist IR and Feminist Security Studies, and by outlining calls to action and the scope for further work.

Chapter One: Making feminist sense of the ‘War on Terror’

This chapter review of the literature to which this thesis aims to contribute, namely, scholarship on the representations of Muslim women post 9/11. It will examine the literature tackling the gendered dimensions of the ‘War on Terror’, specifically US representations of Muslim women since 9/11 and discusses why the issue of representation is important to the practice of International Relations. In particular, it explores how the representations of Muslim women since 9/11 share many similarities, as well as certain ruptures, with the representations of colonized women in colonial discourse. I argue that despite a considerable body of literature illustrating the role of gender and race in underpinning the ‘War on Terror’ and the epistemic violence (Gayatri Spivak, 1988) of US representations of Muslim women, the question of how these women respond to such representations and how they narrate their own identities and lives has received much less attention. The literature review emphasizes the importance of including Muslim women’s own responses towards US foreign policy and to US representations if we are to guard against essentialism and think beyond binary oppositions. It also argues for the importance of Feminist Security Studies in valuing empirical research and the reconceptualization of security. Towards this end, the thesis proposes to explore the specific case of Iraqi women who have been the subject of US foreign policy narratives since 9/11 as well as targeted by foreign policies as part of US efforts for regime change in Iraq and the establishment of a pro-US, stable government thereafter. I will argue that presenting Iraqi women’s experiences as alternative knowledge offers an effective way to disrupt hegemonic knowledge about them and to highlight their agency in order to combat essentializing them. Further, examining the specific case study of Iraqi women, I argue, has ramifications on the ways in which we approach the subject of the representation of marginalized women as a whole.

In order to analyse women’s narratives of their experiences since 2003 and their attitudes towards US foreign policy narratives, the thesis adopts the narrative approach of Maria Stern and Annick Wibben, which conceptualizes security and identity as mutually constitutive. Through this framework, the thesis seeks to highlight and to understand the ways in which Iraqi women’s narratives constitute alternative knowledge about international politics.

Literature review

This section offers a broad overview of how Feminist IR scholars sought to demonstrate the ‘War on Terror’ has gendered and race-ed dimensions. I also discuss in more detail the nature of representations of Muslim women

within US media and foreign policy narratives since 9/11. I demonstrate both the similarities and differences between media and foreign policy narratives, which, in turn, suggest their embeddedness in longer, historical orientalist discourses about Middle East/oriental women as well as the ways in which the 'War on Terror' has transformed these representations. The focus is on Muslim, rather than specifically Afghan, Iraqi, or other nationalities of women, because US narratives often conflate women of multiple nationalities (and religious traditions) within this overarching category. The terrorist attack of 9/11 is a watershed moment in such representations, as it triggered the 'War on Terror' and its corresponding foreign policy narratives. A closer look at the scholarly literature examining media and foreign policy narratives, as represented within the US media and other political and public sources, will demonstrate the need for capturing alternative forms of knowledge of international politics by the women who have been the objects of US foreign policy narratives on the 'War on Terror.'

Gender and Race in the 'War on Terror'

Following the terrorist attacks on America on September 11, 2001, the US, under the presidency of George W. Bush, launched the so-called 'War on Terror' to justify the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. Non-feminist scholars such as Stephen Reese and Seth Lewis (2009, p. 85) argue that this slogan represents 'a powerful ideological frame' which was effective in garnering support for US military action, as the slogan was tactfully labelled by Bush (2001) as an us vs them conflict, famously declaring: 'either you are with us or with the terrorists'. The phrase denotes that those who support the US stand for advancing American liberal values such as freedom and democracy and those who oppose the US are perceived as supporting terror and oppression. Frames such as these are more than persuasive foreign policy tools; they operate as 'organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world' (Reese, 2001, p. 11). As such, scholars believed that the 'War on Terror' narrative created a powerful social effect.

However, these scholars have failed to take into account the gendered and race-ed dimensions of the 'War on Terror' narrative (amongst others, Hunt & Rygiel, 2016; Steans, 2013; Zine, 2002; Tickner, 2002; Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009). Laura Shepherd highlights the significance of Laura Bush's speech to the nation after 9/11 which represented women and children in Afghanistan as victims in order to justify the need for the US to bomb Afghanistan:

Civilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror [...] because our hearts break for the women and children in Afghanistan [...] because in Afghanistan we see the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us [...] Fighting

brutality against women and children [...] is the acceptance of our common humanity (Shepherd, 2006, p. 20).

Shepherd (2006, p. 34) argues that the power of Laura Bush's speech depends upon the way in which particular constructions of Afghani women as passive victims are 'presented as natural and therefore unproblematic'. In this way, particular constructions of Afghan women underpin the pursuit of the 'War on Terror' by the Bush administration. Similarly, Jill Steans (2013, p. 147) argues that, after 9/11, US foreign policy discourse:

constructed and represented women as one of the key markers of civilization. On the other hand, Afghani women were constructed as 'innocents' oppressed by the forces of barbarism represented by Afghan men... [This] narrative made sense within the overarching meta-narrative of the War on terror as a fight to protect and advance freedom and civilization in the face of the feared onslaught on oppressive and barbaric forces.

In other words, the 'War on Terror' discourse was underpinned by particular representations of Afghan women and men, as well as producing notions of US superiority.

The literature tackling the gendered and race-ed dimensions of the 'War on Terror' has identified three recurring themes, explored in more depth below:

1. The necessity of the US 'rescuing' or 'saving' Muslim women;
2. The deployment of the veil, particularly since 9/11, as a marker of the oppression of Muslim women;
3. The collapse of a diversity of Middle Eastern identities into the discursive, homogenizing figure of 'the Muslim woman' constructed by US discourse.

Theme 1: 'saving'

This section argues that the 'saving' narrative is primarily about justifying and validating US intervention which operates to deny Muslim women's agency as they are treated as 'victims' and 'objects' of US liberation. Some scholars, such as Katherine Allison (2011), argue that the US has invested Muslim women with some degree of agency, albeit restricted. In both cases, I shall demonstrate that these narratives of saving have appropriated Muslim women's agency to justify US interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The agency of Muslim women was denied as they were infantilised and equated with passive children. As Laura Shepherd (2006, p. 20) notes, US foreign policy remarks deny 'them both adulthood and agency, affording them only pity'. Nayak (2006, p. 50) builds on this argument by discussing

how infantilising Muslim women has helped the US build its identity as masculine, thereby invoking protective qualities: 'If one counters infantilization, one effectively doubts the US ability to save others and thus threatens the very strength the USA proclaims it (still) has'. Nayak (2006, p. 50) goes on to explain the US's rationale for projecting paternalistic care:

The paternalist mission, wherein only a real man can save suffering women under the shadow of the gun, is crucial for alleviating the anxiety that the USA has experienced since 9/11. Because states feminize boundaries, the invasion of such translates into imagery of an impotent, emasculated man unable to protect his possessions from being violated and destroyed.

Thus, the US proved it is capable of offering 'protection'. In representing Muslim women as inferior, the superior strength of the US—even its 'Hypermasculinity' (Nandy, 1983), that is, a reactionary masculine assertion of power in the face of a threat—is palpable. The US was able to express its own agency to justify US intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The US did not just bolster military might; it also promoted itself as having morally superior values. Al-Saji (2009) argues that the appeal for the liberation of Muslim women forms a central part of the rhetoric that US politicians used to justify the war, and that this takes two related forms: the explicit depiction of oppressed Muslim women, and the implicit claim that, given such oppression, Western cultures are morally superior to Muslim cultures. Intervention by external US forces is thus justified by the argument that Muslim cultures lack a concept of freedom, which must therefore be introduced by an external power. This is another instance where Muslim women cannot speak for themselves, as the US believes it is in a better position to determine their agency for them.

Razack (2008, p. 4) demonstrates that the saving narrative not only underpins Western superiority and justifies Western intervention but also serves to demonise Muslim men to justify the violence that is perpetrated against them in the 'War on Terror': 'globally, while Muslim men have been the target of an intense policing, Muslim women have been singled out as needing protection from their violent and hyper-patriarchal men'. The agency of Muslim men is erased here in order to make the case for rescuing Muslim women. Riley (2013, p. 3) extends this argument:

Western women have freedoms—sexual, occupational, cultural; that Muslim women do not. Consequently, as the story from the Western perspective goes, women from those regions, those religions, over there, are under the control of primitive, brutal, fundamentalist men who would imprison women and brainwash them in order to have them under their sway. In this scenario, Western men are posited as

liberal and free-thinking, and appreciative of every aspect of female liberation. They therefore pose no threat to the women of Afghanistan and Iraq. On the contrary, Western men are the potential saviors [sic] of these women. In the West women continue to be used to promote or justify war.

Riley's argument is that Western narratives about women in Afghanistan and Iraq present Western men and their values as superior to Muslim men, and therefore in the best position to save Muslim women from victimization. This echoes Spivak's (1988, p. 297) description of colonialism as 'White men saving brown women from brown men'.

Some Western feminists have also supported and helped elaborate this narrative, as evidenced in Phyllis Chesler's writing. She argues that the United States and Israel together face a deadly enemy, Muslims, and the 'terrorist' politics they espouse. Discussing women in Afghanistan, Chesler (2005, p. 198) writes, 'as a feminist, I have long dreamed of rescuing women who are trapped in domestic and sexual slavery against their will with no chance of escape'. This is another instance where Afghani women are denied agency. Instead, Chesler speaks for Afghani women by supporting the 'saving' narrative, which rests on an understanding of Muslim women as victimized, only to be saved through American exceptionalism (Lispet, 1998) that includes both American men and American women.

Some authors have detected that the US have represented Muslim women with some degree of agency. As Al-Ali and Pratt argue (2009, p. 59), the US simultaneously constructed Iraqi women as victims and as heroines: 'The US military invasion of Iraq not only purported to 'save' Iraqi women, who had been long-suffering victims of the Saddam Hussein regime, but transformed them from victims to heroines'. Yet despite recognising a degree of agency, it is still regarded problematic as the US has set the terms upon which Muslim women are recognised as agential.

Similarly, Katherine Allison (2013) goes beyond binary representations in her analysis of US government representations of Muslim women to argue that they have not been depicted merely as victims but as having some degree of agency. For example, early in the invasion of Afghanistan, US Secretary of State Colin Powell (Allison, 2013, p. 674) stated:

During these years of great suffering, the women of Afghanistan have been the backbone of the Afghan society. It is in large measure a thanks to their endurance, their ingenuity, their courage, that their country has survived.

Allison (2013, p. 681) argues that the Muslim woman is ascribed a particular kind of agency by the US, one that centres around her religious identity:

The agential Muslim woman appears to represent a familiarisation of the self, a reflection both idealised and domesticated. She reconciles the conflicts of a fractured US society being devout in her religious beliefs and practices but equally at home in the modern, liberal, and pluralist society.

Allison (2013, p. 666) adds that the ‘agential Muslim woman’ has subverted this ‘polarization of Occident and Orient by embodying both a recognisably Islamic practice and Western standards of emancipated modernity’. Yet, the ‘agential Muslim woman’ may create another binary: that of ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ Muslim women. Shakira Hussein (2016, p. 74) argues:

According to this dichotomy, religiously pious women stubbornly adhere to their false consciousness on behalf of an aggressive patriarchal ideology. In contrast, ‘good’ Muslim women are those who confine their religious practice to private space, who accept that their ethno-religious identity must take second place to their identity as national citizens, who not only successfully embody Enlightenment values in their own lives, but who help to promote internal reform within their own societies and communities.

Sunaina Maira (2009, pp. 635–636) also writes about the binary of good and bad Muslim women and recognizes the specific race-ed gendered dimension of such a binary:

By definition, “good” Muslims are public Muslims who can offer first-person testimonials, in the mode of the native informant, about the oppression of women in Islam[...] In contrast, “bad” Muslims are made into public exemplars of anti- Western enemies by state allegations of threats to national security and US democracy; hysterical media coverage; virtually no opportunities to present, let alone publish, their own views and stories; and often distorted accounts of their activities and politics.

I recognize it is important to understand the degree to which these more ambivalent representations destabilize the Other. For example, the transformation of Iraqi women from victims to ‘heroines’ has been dependent upon the degree to which they complied with US ambitions in Iraq, thereby instrumentalizing Iraqi women as agents of US foreign policy (see Al-Ali & Pratt 2009). Moreover, the representation of the agential Muslim woman is dependent upon her practising her religion in a way that is compatible with a modern, liberal and pluralist society. In this respect, it

is interesting to consider Zillah Eisenstein's (2007) argument, which introduces the notion of 're-racing' to characterize a process whereby a racialized group may be re-coded 'white' through their adoption of 'white' values. Eisenstein argues that the act of re-racing race produces the illusion of racial equality, when in fact it only serves as an act of appropriation. While I recognize that the act of appropriation does exist in order to maintain the exercise of power, this mask the agency of women. These women desire to adopt such values and have developed a different understanding of how they are perceived by others when embracing them. This is an area that I will explore later in this study, particularly with regard to Iraqi women who hold conforming or mixed-conforming attitudes towards the ways in which the US represented them.

Theme 2: the veil

The trope of the veil in the representation of Muslim women is a key dimension of the construction of Muslim women as 'oppressed' and in need of saving as several scholars have noted (Lazreg 2009; Al-Sajji, 2009; and others). Marnia Lazreg (2009, p. 10) notes that 'the veil has traditionally been discussed as the most tangible sign of women's 'oppression''. It shows:

that Islam is a backward and misogynous religion, and underscore[es] the callousness or cruelty of the men who use Islam for political aims. Such a view made it acceptable to hail the war launched against Afghanistan in 2001 as a war of 'liberation' of women (Lazreg, 2009, p. 10).

The fact that the veil was commonly associated with Muslim women meant it became a convenient symbol to depict their victimization and set up a narrative that they required saving through the US's 'War on Terror'.

Nancy Jabra (2006, p. 240) traces the US media's portrayal of Middle Eastern women's 'oppression' through their clothing—'some sort of hijab or veil: the chador, the abaya, the burqa'—and contrasts these images with those of 'liberated' American women to mark the race-ed and gendered disparities between American and Muslim women, interpreting their representation in a binary manner.

Thus, building a narrative of veiled Muslim women as oppressed helped US media and politicians associate messages and images of unveiling Muslim women with American 'liberation'. As Maryam Khalid (2011, p. 21) notes:

An article in USA Today explicitly conflated the act of removing burqas and American-led 'liberation', as women 'threw them [burqas] on the fire and lit the way for their rescuers'. President

George W. Bush claimed in 2002 that the victory over the Taliban had 'liberated the women of Afghanistan'. State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher linked liberation to the removal of the burqa, as these liberated Afghan women could now be seen 'sometimes even without wearing a burqa.'

The spoken remarks of US politicians were supported by US media images that reproduced the idea that veiled Muslim women equated to oppression. This in turn conflated American-led liberation with the removal of the burqas, which served to reinforce the victim/saviour binary.

Similarly, Dana Cloud also argues that US media presented women without the veil in order to demonstrate the successes of US intervention. Cloud offers the example of the US website time.com featuring a photograph of a TV announcer without her burqa. The photograph implies US intervention has brought modernity to Afghani women:

This single photograph actually represents the woman three times, once in a medium shot of her profile as she reads from news reports, and twice (in waist shots of her still seated as she reads) on television monitors in the foreground. These layers of simulacra offer a sharp modern contrast to the image of the burqa-clad woman making her way through the ruins of a pre-modern world (Cloud, 2004, pp. 295—296).

Shahira Fahmy offers a slightly different argument to the way in which Afghani women were portrayed in US media. She argues that the US media were subtler in portraying Afghani women's liberation; the US media photographed Afghani women donning the veil even after their liberation from the old regime:

the burqas were not removed however, in an attempt to rescue the discourse of women's liberation, photographers may have used subtle visual cues to communicate a relatively better environment for Afghan women following the fall of the Taliban regime (Fahmy, 2004, p. 108).

Most scholars writing on the veil in the context of 9/11, however, have interpreted them in negative and binary terms: Muslim women victims vs US saviour.

Western attention to Muslim women's veiling can be traced at least as far back to European colonialism. Frantz Fanon (1965, p. 42) argued that during the French colonial era, the French tried to encourage the unveiling of Algerian women as part of their civilising mission: 'here and there it thus happened that a woman was 'saved' and symbolically 'unveiled''. Lila Abu-

Lughod (2002, p. 783) for instance, has drawn parallel with such colonial argument of the veil: '[There are] resonances of contemporary discourses on equality, freedom, and rights with earlier colonial and missionary rhetoric on Muslim women'. Abu Lughod further argues that US politicians tend to make generalizations about the veil and fail to grasp the diverse range of opinions operant in Islamic societies. Abu-Lughod (2002, p. 786) emphasizes the need to work against the 'reductive interpretation of veiling as the quintessential sign of women's unfreedom' and opposes the reduction of 'diverse situations and attitudes of millions of Muslim women to a single item of clothing'.

The majority of the literature has exposed the inequalities and iniquities of hegemonic knowledge of the veil, and further demonstrates how the agency of Muslim women has been discounted by US media and officials. Many scholars writing about the veil in the context of 9/11 have prioritized anti-colonial or anti-imperialist positions and have not left room for other positions to be highlighted, for instance those who side with a colonial stance on the veil. However, it is important to note that there are examples of Muslim feminist scholars who oppose the veil and are also anti-imperialist, such as Haideh Moghissi (2005). There are also examples of Muslim or former Muslim feminists whose writings could be regarded as endorsing a colonial paradigm towards Islam and veiling, such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali (2015).

Theme 3: the homogenization of Muslim women

The homogenization of Muslim women is another theme that the US used to help construct their saving narrative. This theme was central to the construction of Western superiority and binary opposites such as West vs East.

The literature demonstrates that US narratives since 9/11 have conflated the multivalent 'Arab woman' into the singular figure of the 'Muslim woman', who functions as the Other to the universalised Western subject (Abu-Lughod, 2001; Khalid & Nayak, 2006; Al-Saji, 2009; among others). The majority of the literature has sought to tackle the issue of homogenization 'by contesting the 'truths' of gendered and orientalist knowledge and uncovering the power relations underlying these representations' (Khalid, 2011, p. 29).

Abu-Lughod proposes that the eradication of the plurality of Muslim women's experiences demonstrates how the US is happy to accommodate difference in itself, but it depicts the Arab world, the Muslim world and the Middle East as homogeneous blocks. In US narratives therefore, the assumption remains that all women in the Middle Eastern region can be represented under the figure of the 'Muslim woman'. Alia Al-Saji (2009)

has supported this argument by providing an anecdote to illustrate the homogeneity of Muslim women. Al-Saji (Al-Saji, 2009, pp. 66–67) describes herself as ‘a Muslim-Canadian Woman of Iraqi Origin who has lived most of my life in the West’. However, she is perceived as an ‘authentic insider’ because of her origins, which has meant that she finds herself ‘called on to respond to some questions, confirm hypotheses, and give an ‘insider’s’ perspective on Muslim women and their practices’ (Al-Saji, 2009, pp. 66–67). This demonstrates how the homogenization of Muslim women seeped into the public sphere and how it has become socially acceptable to disregard differences amongst them.

Nadine Naber (2008, p. 3) discusses the ‘conflation of the categories ‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim’’, providing the example of a Roman Catholic Arab American family who renamed their son from Osama to Sam after being called a ‘Muslim terrorist’. While Naber does not exclusively focus on gendered constructions of Muslims, her study demonstrates how a post-9/11 narrative has racialized Muslims and depicted them as an Other. Her study is illuminating in that she uses empirical research to measure the impact of the race-ed dimensions of US foreign policy on Arab Americans. This relates to my study, as I am not only concerned with understanding the extent to which gendered issues affect women but am also concerned with questions relating to race and how it intersects with gender and other social axes. Specifically, I will explore the extent to which these conflations of Arabs and terrorists, and Arabs and Muslims, amongst others, have impacted (if at all) Iraqi women’s lives.

The logic behind homogenizing Muslims, some scholars such as Evelyn Alsultany (2012, p. 9) argue, was to help the US set up the narrative of saving Muslim women:

Arab/Muslim conflation is strategically useful to the US government during the War on Terror because it comes with baggage. It draws on centuries old Orientalist narratives of patriarchal societies and oppressed women of Muslim fundamentalism.

Several scholars support this argument that such assumptions are steeped in colonial-orientalist stereotypes (see Al-Sajji, 2009 or Khalid, 2011). For example, Lord Cromer, who was the British consul-general in Egypt during British rule, invoked the status of women to indicate how Islam oppressed women as a moral justification of colonial rule (see Ahmed, 1992; Lughod, 2002; and Al-Sajji, 2009).

By homogenizing Muslim women as victims and regressive, the US was able to emphasize its “exceptional” capabilities of bringing Western modernity and US values to these women, who are portrayed as otherwise uncivilized. According to Sunaina Maira (2009, p. 631):

US discourse [is] about bringing “democracy” and “human rights,” particularly “women’s rights,” to regions that presumably need to catch up with Western modernity. In this social Darwinist model, human subjects trapped in antidemocratic, patriarchal, and tribalistic cultures need to be liberated in order to achieve the “freedom” of individual autonomy promised to the fittest by neoliberal capitalism.

Maira demonstrates that underpinning US narratives is the idea that American values must prevail and that it is incumbent upon the US to introduce these values to ‘uncivilized’ societies; as part of this narrative, rhetoric of women’s rights is frequently used.

The idea of progress is a central component for enabling the US to exercise exceptionalism. Zine (2002, p. 3) writes: ‘The narrative of ‘progress’ therefore creates a rationale for the occupation of Iraq as a benevolent gesture of humanitarianism’. This further reinforces the progressive/backwards binary as invoking the narrative of progress, which signals that societies, such as Iraqi societies, are perceived as ‘eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself or of change and progress by virtue of being the Orient’ (Said, 1979, p. 301).

It is important to note that scholars are often dependent upon binaries, which present Muslim women as victims, in their critique of the homogenization of Muslim women. While I acknowledge that these binaries are reproduced in US narratives of the ‘War on Terror’ and that these binaries are problematic, nonetheless, the identification of these binaries does not dismantle them.

While I recognize that it is vital to critique hegemonic knowledge about Muslim women in order to identify uneven power relations at play, there is a danger that this body of literature favours a change ‘for women’ rather than a change ‘by women’ and that ‘in speaking ‘for women’ [these authors] largely objectify and depict women as passive victims’ (Youngs, 2006, p. 15). Further, such critiques of US discourses leave little room for understanding women’s agency beyond resistance to these narratives. What about women who may endorse such narratives? Are these women merely dupes of hegemonic discourse without any agency? This thesis explores these questions by offering a pluralistic account of women’s experiences. In doing so, I build further on Gillian Youngs’ observations by centring on women’s own narratives, including their responses to hegemonic narratives of which they are the object. I argue that capturing a pluralistic account of their experiences will challenge binary oppositions as it highlights differences in narratives, thereby disrupting hegemonic knowledge about Muslim women.

The importance of studying representations and gender in international politics

This section will discuss key theories that have influenced scholars' work on the subject of the representation of Muslim women since 9/11. I will also discuss how their contribution is important for advancing the field of IR's understanding of gender and representation in international politics as well as highlight key reasons that we need more studies that pay attention to questions of gender and representation.

Postcolonial scholars, in particular, have long highlighted the concrete implications of the West's racialized and gendered discourses about the Other. This is most famously elaborated in Edward Said's (1978, p. 3) study of Orientalism:

Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient [...] Such language is all the more effective because of its naturalness, authority, professionalism, assertiveness, and anti-theoretical directness.

The relevance of Said's text goes beyond the colonial modes of representation employed in the 'War on Terror' discourse. Said's work is important for understanding how the development of Western knowledge about the Other is integral to the exercise of power. Postcolonial feminist scholars believed that the underpinning idea of Orientalism, that the West holds dominant power over the representation of the East, is visible in US representations of Muslim women since 9/11. The representation of Muslim women as victims set out by US foreign policy has become common currency. The reiteration of their representation takes hold through the process of hegemony, described by Said (1978, p. 7) as the:

influence of ideas, of institution, and of other persons [which] works not through domination but by what Gramsci calls consent. [...] certain cultural forms predominate over others [...] It is hegemony, or rather the cultural hegemony at work, that gives orientalism [its] durability and strength.

To understand the power of representation, it is vital to recognise the link between Western representations of non-Western societies and power-knowledge. Said (1978, p. 3) adopted Foucault's concept of power-knowledge to argue that Western knowledge production and the West's imperial domination were interweaved. This point is central to

understanding why postcolonial feminists are concerned with Western representations of Other women. Yet despite the fact that Said neglected to study the importance of gender in the construction of East-West binaries, feminist scholars have built on his key insights about the relationship between Western knowledge and power.

In doing so, some postcolonial feminist scholars were able to offer a more nuanced gendered orientalist reading of the veil. For example, Meyda Yegenoglu offers the example of how the veil might threaten the West, particularly in terms of surveillance. She writes, 'the veil can be seen as the resisting data or topology of this modern power whose program aims to construct the world in terms of transparency provided by knowledge as power' (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 41). She adds:

'Bentham's model prison, the panopticon, embodies the concept of an eye which can see without being seen [...] the veil is, thus, the 'inverse of Bentham's omnipotent gaze. The loss of control does not imply a mere loss of sight, but a complete reversal of positions: her body completely invisible to the European observer except for her eyes, the veiled woman can see without being seen' (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 41-43).

That the veil should represent, for the West, a subject who needs to be disciplined reflects the multi-layered reading of it.

Postcolonial feminists have also demonstrated how European women criticized Muslims as a means of criticising European domesticity. Lamia Zayzafoon (2005, pp. 32–33) writes that Isabelle Eberhardt, a young European woman who travelled through North Africa in the late nineteenth century, reproduced 'the male Orientalist stereotypes about the 'Muslim woman', [but] transform[ed] them to criticize the ideal of domesticity in fin de siècle European society'. These readings show that a gender analysis is central to understanding of the historical complexities on the representation of the Other.

Feminist scholars have argued for the importance of gender as a category of analysis for understanding the complexities of the representation of the Other. Moreover, feminist and postcolonial scholars have argued that the power of representation can produce inequalities and silence certain groups from expressing agency. However, there is still an abundantly clear lack of attention given to the study of representation in the field of IR. As Nair and Chowdhry (2004, p. 16) have argued, '[IR] has not only ignored the question of representation, but also assumed that mainstream IR's language [Realism] is universal, giving it the authority to speak for and about others'.

The study of narrative and representation is indeed underused within mainstream IR today, due largely to the positivist approach of most scholars

within this field (Smith, 1996, p. 11). This approach is often antithetical to a methodological approach premised on narrative and perception. Within mainstream IR, language is ‘merely the means by which propositions about cause and effect relationships and explanations are conveyed to an audience in a way that makes sense’ (Steans, 2013, p. 141). That is, positivist researchers view language as a vehicle by which to *describe* the world, rather than subscribing to the idea that language functions to construct the world. Therefore, positivists view facts as producing true knowledge. This view limits the ways in which one can challenge what are considered to be ‘facts’. By contrast, the present work adopts the view that ‘facts’ can be contested because there are inevitably various ways of interpreting knowledge. Moreover, the dominance of positivism and realism in the field of IR is problematic, because it reinforces the assumptions underpinning the exercise of power by the West over the other. Mainstream IR assumes that ‘language is universal and unproblematic, [which gives mainstream IR] [...] the authority of speaking for and about others’ (Chowdhry & Nair, 2004, p. 16).

The field of IR continues to marginalize alternative forms of knowledge that could challenge dominant power relations. Using the metaphor of a house to describe IR’s resemblance to a colonial household, Agathangelou and Ling (2004, p. 11) argue that IR’s lack of attention to alternative knowledge is depriving the field of rich and varied knowledge:

The Native Other refers to non-Western, non-white source of knowledge, traditions, or worlds. These may be smuggled in “wards” of the house but otherwise are not recognized as identities in their own right. Such alienation does not allow the house to formalize connections between and different producers of knowledge, although informal cross-internalisations flourish and from the most unexpected sources.

The current literature on the gendered and racialized dimensions of the ‘War on Terror’ and, within this, the representations of Muslim women, has also to some extent side-lined alternative forms of knowledge. It has tended to focus on hegemonic discourses and narratives. This is important in terms of drawing attention to the ways in which the fixing of gendered and racialized representations through particular narratives underpins certain US foreign policies. However, such an approach also risks reproducing the binaries that are implicated in hegemonic discourses and narratives, thus marginalizing the subjective experiences of those who are the objects of such discourses and narratives.

In much of the literature, Muslim women are only considered as passive victims of US media and foreign policy discourses. For example, various feminist postcolonial critics as well as Feminist IR scholars have pointed to

orientalist tropes of 'veiling' and 'saving' which risk reproducing 'an Orientalized dichotomy of America vs Islam self vs other in a 'clash of civilisations' manner' (Allison, 2013, p. 666). Zine (2002, p. 2) problematizes such discourses 'of abject victimhood' as essentializing the representation of Muslim women and limiting their agency. Gillian Youngs also problematizes feminist scholars' heavy focus on studying hegemonic discourses; she urges scholars instead to include women's experiences and perspectives on the 'War on Terror'. She writes:

We need studies that explain how women have been and continue to be marginalized, othered and silenced, as well as those that counter that marginalization, othering and silencing by making women present in diverse ways (Youngs, 2006, p. 15).

Therefore, in order to challenge the binaries of hegemonic discourses and narratives, this thesis shifts the focus on women's subjective experiences of the 'War on Terror' and US foreign policy discourses. This thesis aims to contribute to creating an alternative, non-hegemonic knowledge. In this way, it builds on the very few studies of women's lived experiences of the 'War on Terror' (Al-Ali, 2007; Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009; Enloe, 2010). These studies demonstrate the gendered impacts of the Iraq War on women's lives, in terms of violence and insecurity, increased burdens of social reproduction, and marginalization within the public sphere, as well as highlight women's agency in terms of resisting these processes and addressing their negative effects.

My thesis extends this work in two ways. First, it considers Iraqi women's own responses to US foreign policy discourses and narratives. Second, it attempts to capture the diversity of Iraqi women's experiences not only in relation to the 2003 invasion and its immediate aftermath but also in relation to the US troop withdrawal in 2010 and the US bombing of the Islamic State from 2014 onwards. This thesis seeks to move away from binaries of victim vs heroine, anti-US vs pro-US, as they preclude the wide range of experiences and attitudes that may be held by women experiencing complex situations. As Nadjie Al-Ali (2007) demonstrates through her collection of oral histories of Iraqi women, experiences and attitudes may (although not necessarily) flow from the differences among Iraqi women, based on their class, religion/sect, place of residency and/or memories of the former regime of Saddam Hussein, among other social differences.

Feminist Security Studies

One sub-field of Feminist IR that has prioritized women's experiences is that of Feminist Security Studies. My project treats Feminist Security Studies as a form of embodied knowledge that will help this thesis situate Iraqi women's own concepts of security in wider gendered security

contexts. This thesis responds to the fact that US politicians have previously discussed Iraqi women's security without accounting for Iraqi women's own conceptions of security. I will first discuss the possible alternative conceptions of security rooted in Feminist Security Studies, and then go on to discuss how standpoint theory has helped me to interpret the interviewees' security narratives in a more agential and contextualized manner.

To begin, Feminist Security Studies provides a platform for the life-grounded experiences of women otherwise elided by the mainstream literature on International Relations and Security Studies. It encourages IR to take the study of gender more seriously, arguing that the definition of security must be widened, if not reconceptualized, beyond concepts of state sovereignty and national security in order to encompass the issues that affect women, such as sexual violence, patriarchy, the economy, and the environment (Blanchard, 2003, p. 1292). Moreover, feminists question the state as the guarantor of women's security, arguing that in fact the state may be a source of insecurity for them. Feminist approaches to security and IR draw on notions of gendered and structural violence to problematize dominant understandings of security and to prompt researchers to consider 'who is being secured by security policies' (Blanchard, 2003, 1290).

Similarly, scholars who work on human security recognize different types of security that are reflective of feminist concerns to move away from state-centric notions of security and recognise the insecurity caused by structural violence. Despite this, feminist security scholars have contested the concept of 'human security'.

What is human security and why is the term contested by feminist security scholars? There are various perspectives on the concept of human security, but its proponents all agree that the referent object of security is the individual. Where scholars tend to diverge in this matter usually involves questions related to purpose and scope (Liotta & Owen, 2006).

Thus, one of the most salient debates regarding human security involves agreeing upon whether there needs to be a broadening or narrowing of the understanding of this term. Scholars who sought to narrow the definition tended to focus on 'freedom from fear', which refers to physical and personal safety. Examples of this include examining state repressions of peoples and failed governments (see, for example, Mack, 2004; MacFarlane & Khong, 2006).

By contrast, the camp which favours broadening the term encompasses both issues of 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want', where the latter refers to basic needs such as food and shelter. Both these examples of narrowing and broadening definitions of human security have been

challenged by critical theorists and feminists in terms of their normative approach to security lacking analytical rigour:

human security arguments are generally 'problem-solving'. They do not generally engage in epistemological, ontological or methodological debates. Human security is therefore considered – and as a result generally dismissed – as 'uncritical' and unsophisticated by critical security scholars. For its part, because human security scholars wish to remain policy relevant – and accessible to policy circles – they have been reluctant to explore overtly 'critical' security studies themes, either because they feel these are unnecessary or because they fear that such theoretical pursuits will alienate them from the policy world. (Newman, 2010, p. 77).

Feminist scholars proved how normative definitions of human security are problematic by taking issue with the idea of the state being conceived in gender-neutral terms (see, for example, Peterson, 1992). Heidi Hudson (2005, p. 156) argues that feminist perspectives are critical to understanding security issues of women:

There is a real danger that collapsing femininity or masculinity into the term 'human' could conceal the gendered underpinnings of security practices. The term 'human' is presented as though it were gender-neutral, but very often it is an expression of the masculine.

Feminist scholars thus tasked themselves with rectifying this issue by critically dismantling gendered assumptions, such as the idea that women are linked unreflectively with peace (Blanchard, 2003, p. 1290); such assumptions hinder any meaningful understanding of human insecurities. In addition, it is important to study gender itself, as Jill Steans (1998, p.5) puts it: “to look at the world through gendered lenses is to focus on gender as a particular kind of power relation, or to trace out the ways in which gender is central to understanding international processes.”

My project acknowledges that human security lacks any serious consideration of gender and women's experiences. However, my project does find certain elements of human security to be useful to some extent. It will primarily adopt themes borrowed from the UNDP (1994, p. 24) which, under the rubrics of human security, introduced seven subset themes of security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security. I observed that the themes of economic, personal and community security were recurrent concerns in the interviewees' narratives. It is also important to understand how my project diverges from these more common perceptions of security.

More broadly, the present project seeks to extend the work on human security by considering the role of individual agency, rather than viewing women as merely victims of insecurity. In relation to my project, Western politicians, commentators and even some scholars have tended to conceive of Iraqi women's security in relation to 'negative security', that is, the absence of any threat to well-being (Gjorv, 2012) such as dictatorship or patriarchy. Meanwhile, 'positive security', that is, the ability to determine ways to stop or mitigate these threats, either individually or collectively (Gjorv, 2012), has seen far less discussion in relation to Iraqi women's security. Whilst the interviewees discussed the wish to live without threat to their well-being, they also emphasized their opinions, as well as their agency, towards mitigating threats.

I have thus reviewed how Feminist scholars have attempted to redefine the concept of security to include gender as a category of analysis. This enables us to think about gender and women's experiences as matters of security in international relations. Within Feminist Security Studies there are many different ways of approaching the study of security, with each approach yielding different outcomes, which in itself demonstrates that a feminist approach to security is not monolithic. Theoretical approaches to Feminist Security include a postcolonial theory and a poststructuralist theory, whilst methodological approaches include discourse analysis, narrative analysis and empirical research, amongst others.

For example, Laura Shepherd (2008) takes a post-structural approach to security. She uses a discursive approach to deconstruct NGOs and the UN documents that affect gender issues in the context of international policy. Shepherd's analysis, however, lacks a certain focus on human agency because she prioritizes discursive analysis.

More generally, post-structural feminists' approaches consider gender to be an important category of analysis - as, indeed, does this project - but such an approach to security tend to lack a critical consideration of Western-centric gendered assumptions.

The postcolonial theory of security acts as a remedy to this issue, as it critiques traditional accounts of security that otherwise uncritically draw on their "core categories and assumptions about world politics from a particular understanding of European experience". (Barkawi and Laffey, 2006., p. 330).

Swati Parashar (2014) takes a postcolonial leaning and uses interviews as her method to explore women's perspectives of the conflicts in Kashmir and Sri Lanka in order to analyse their involvement in anti-state armed movements. She demonstrates how conflicts are highly complicated by problematizing binaries such as "agency/victimhood, speech/silence

binaries.” (p.17). My thesis will similarly use interviews and postcolonial theory to avoid imposing Western-centric meanings on Iraqi women’s security and will instead emphasize cultural context and complicate reductive orientalist binaries.

Methodologically, Christine Sylvester encourages empirical research into security (2013, pp. 444–445), where her argument highlights the importance of experience in offering life-grounded theoretical insight:

US-based discussions of feminist security can make the mistake much of mainstream IR does: both dwell comfortably in an abstracted world. But security has experiential aspects, as does war [...] and focusing on those experiences [...] can provide reality tests that lead to episodes of life-grounded theoretical insight.

To address the issue of feminists’ abstract approaches to security, my thesis seeks to build on Sylvester’s argument. I will adopt a standpoint epistemology which will help me be mindful in terms of allowing the interviewees to articulate their own understandings and experiences of security without being directed, or otherwise influenced by myself to speak about certain types of security (as defined by politicians, security ‘experts’, or academics).

An example of another methodology used in feminist security studies include discourse analysis. Feminist scholar Carol Cohn (1987) has analysed the sexualised language of defence intellectuals in order to demonstrate how their discourse operates within their world by exploring themes such as domination and power. Linked to the study of discourse is the narrative approach. Laura Sjoberg has used a narrative approach in order to study security. She examined the “ ‘beautiful soul’ narrative to describe women’s relationship with war throughout its history” (2010, p.53). In doing so, she demonstrates how “the image of women’s innocence of and abstention from war has often contrasted with women’s actual experiences as soldiers and fighters.” (Ibid). Meanwhile, Annick Wibben also adopted a narrative approach to her study of the relationship between security and identity where she emphasizes the capture of “varied everyday experience” (p.15, 2011), and which takes into consideration women’s social backgrounds in order to highlight differences in their experiences. I will extend Wibben’s work by demonstrating how my empirical case study, which takes a narrative approach to security, is operationalized and accounts for differences in experiences.

Now that I have discussed the various feminist theoretical and methodological approaches to studying security, the following sections will introduce key themes in Feminist Security Studies and discuss how these inform the thesis.

Feminist Security Scholars have made significant contributions to the conceptualization of war and violence beyond the state-centric notions currently prevalent in mainstream IR. They have challenged traditional concepts of security with ideas such as a gendered continuum of violence, which draws links between different manifestations of violence. Cynthia Cockburn (2004, p. 43) writes:

Gender links violence at different points on a scale reaching from the personal to the international, from the home and the back street to the manoeuvres of the tank column and the sortie of the stealth bomber: battering and marital rape, confinement, “dowry” burnings, honor killings, and genital mutilation in peacetime; military rape, sequestration, prostitution, and sexualized torture in war. No wonder women often say, “War? Don’t speak to me of war. My daily life is battlefield enough.”’.

Cockburn demonstrates that applying the idea of a continuum of violence breaks down binaries such as private versus public, peace versus war, personal versus international, us versus them, and powerful versus powerless, which underpin mainstream approaches to studying war and violence. Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman have challenged the private versus public binary in the context of conflict through the observation that the divide between battlefield and civilian spaces no longer holds. It is increasingly common practice in warfare to incorporate civilians within battlefronts as most modern conflict occurs within states rather than across borders (Giles & Hyndman, 2004, p. 3). Recognizing the fact of the false divide between the public versus private domains will help us acknowledge how women are rendered more vulnerable to violence through the methods of modern warfare.

Certainly, the interviewees demonstrated the breakdown of the homefront and battlefield as a result of war and conflict since 2003. However, it is also important to note that many of them also viewed the private sphere as a source of comfort and protection, and not necessarily as a sphere of violence—even when they are subject to patriarchal control. I explore the idea of private space as a source of security in the context of (post-) conflict situations; in this way, I shall contribute to complicating further the idea of ‘continuum of violence’. The project will demonstrate the fact that standpoint theory foregrounds Iraqi women’s experiences and their narratives, disrupting feminist assumptions about the public and private spheres and sources of oppression and violence.

Another example of how the idea of continuum of violence has been applied by Feminist Security Scholars is through their examination of the issue of rape. They have challenged the binary of war and peace, raising the question

as to whether appropriate security is provided for women, even in peacetime. For example, Pettman (1996, p. 105) makes the case that those who perpetrate rape continue to threaten women in the post-conflict rebuilding process. In the case of Iraq, the aftermath of the invasion created considerable unrest and lawlessness, which has subsequently resulted in all kinds of horrific violence. This raises the issue of the private sphere as a sphere of comfort and security.

I will thus build on the black feminist's approach of challenging the idea of the home as a sphere of patriarchal control versus the public sphere as a source of liberation – which is how white/Western feminists consider it. Kimberley Crenshaw, for example, emphasized the need for context:

feminist literature may make the mistake of assuming that since the role of Black women in the family and in other Black institutions does not always resemble the familiar manifestations of patriarchy in the white community, Black women are somehow exempt from patriarchal norms. For example, Black women have traditionally worked outside the home in number far exceeding the labor participation rate of white women. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 156)

Thus, I aim to apply the idea of the continuum of violence in my study to demonstrate how the private sphere can be a source of comfort and security. My project also considers epistemic violence in an effort to further complicate the idea of continuum of violence. The reductive and generalized representation of Muslim women has to date portrayed them as oppressed. Thus, the impact of hegemonic knowledge on the lived experiences of women in question should be discussed in relation to security.

Complementing the idea of a continuum of violence is the notion of structural violence, first coined by Johan Galtung, who describes the term in the sense of social injustice (1969, p. 171) and as indirect violence (1969, p. 170), to which it is argued that women are particularly vulnerable. Tickner (1992), for example, believes that women experience direct and indirect violence; direct violence denotes physical violence, whilst indirect violence is understood to mean structural violence. She writes of the 'insecurity of individuals whose life expectancy was reduced, not by the direct violence of war but by domestic and international structures of political and economic oppression' (Tickner, 1992, 69). Meanwhile, Anne Runyan and Spike V. Peterson (2014, p. 72) are concerned that: 'structural violence disproportionately affects women and groups subordinated by cultural markers and economic inequalities, and when we ignore this fact, we ignore the (in)security of the planet's majority'. These social structures and inequalities are sometimes difficult to detect, as structural violence is: 'almost always invisible, embedded in ubiquitous social structures, normalized by stable institutions and regular experience' (Winter &

Leighton, 2001, p. 1). From the interviews I conducted with Iraqi women, their narratives revealed that even previously privileged women from the middle classes also reported an erosion of their privileges and status as a result of the war, and so structural violence was not ultimately one of the themes I detected in my project.

Feminist Security Scholars have not only focussed on the negative impacts of war and violence on women, but also on women's agency in resisting this. For example, Giles and Hyndman (2004, p. 16) argue that 'women, in particular, have subverted nationalist projects and developed solidarity movements across national, political, and economic divides, both locally and internationally'. Given the vulnerability and insecurity shown by most of the women that I interviewed, combined with their experiences of displacement and the effects of sectarianism, open examples of collective contestation were not evident. Indeed, scholars have observed that it may even be dangerous for women to engage in the open confrontation of direct and/or indirect violence. For example, Lene Hansen (2000, p. 291–293) examined how honour killing in Pakistan presents a difficult situation; reporting such cases can result in danger to the informant due to their infringement of local customs. This creates a situation where a strategy of 'security as silence' is necessary to protect women from the threats posed by gender-based violence. Hansen's 'security as silence' is applicable to contexts other than rape. This project will examine women's choice of abstention on certain topics, drawing on the concept of 'security as silence' to argue that it can be considered a form of agency because it can be used as a coping strategy.

The issue of war and violence was extremely important to the Iraqi women that I interviewed. In the past two decades alone, Iraqi women have faced military bombing by the US and its allies, the 'shock and awe' of the US-led invasion of Iraq, and the attendant breakdown in security largely as a result of the emergence of anti-US insurgencies, the outbreak of sectarian violence, the emergence of the Islamic State, and the US-led bombing of the Islamic State. These have led to millions of dead and displaced, as well as extensive damage to infrastructure and livelihoods (see Al-Ali, 2007; Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009, amongst others).

Until now, scholarship has not considered how this particular conflict has reshaped the identities of Iraqi women or how this relates to perceptions of their security. Through an intersectional approach, I identified how the interviewees narrated security in relation to intersecting identities of gender, nationality, religious background and class, whilst keeping in mind that the 'feminist analysis of identity must not lose sight of the fact that all aspects of identity are not equal: some are frivolous and inconsequential, while others are all-pervasive and life-altering' (Hekman, 1999, 22). Indeed, the nature of war and violence since 2003, and particularly the rise in

sectarianism, meant that many women prioritized either their religious or national identities above gender and, indeed, other aspects of their identities.

Conclusion

As critical scholars have highlighted, Western representations of non-Western, specifically Muslim (including Iraqi), women are infused with orientalist, race-ed and gendered assumptions. It has long been recognised by postcolonial scholars that there is a need to redress these assumptions and counter the persistent marginalization of non-Western women. This has been particularly acute in the period since 9/11, as Western narratives have systematically conflated various groups of women, including Iraqi women, and collapsed them into the figure of 'the Muslim woman'. Simultaneously, Iraqi women have been instrumentalized by US politicians and media to justify the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

However, despite the importance of critiquing hegemonic discourses and narratives, there has been a failure to prioritize non-hegemonic knowledge or to engage with the women who are the objects of these representations. Therefore, this thesis aims to explore the experiences and attitudes of a range of Iraqi women in order to challenge monolithic representations of the 'Muslim Woman' and binaries of 'oppressed' versus 'agential'. It aims to capture a plurality and diversity of attitudes and experiences among Iraqi women in order to produce a critique of hegemonic knowledge production concerning Iraqi women and, more broadly, Muslim women. Moreover, it seeks to understand their experiences through their own personal narratives.

This thesis therefore asks: How do Iraqi women's narratives disrupt existing hegemonic knowledge about representations and experiences of Muslim women?

To help me answer this main research question, I have formulated three sub-questions:

1. How do Iraqi women narrate their experiences of the 2003 invasion and its aftermath, and what themes emerge within these narratives?
2. How do Iraqi women relate to US foreign policy narratives and representations of Iraqi women?
3. To what degree, if any, do the narratives and self-representations of Iraqi women reflect feminist critiques of hegemonic representations of Other women, particularly Muslim women?

This thesis will uncover themes and experiences, both individual and collective, not addressed in either US foreign policy narratives or feminist critiques of these narratives. It will consider whether hegemonic narratives

matter to these women. This thesis will not only consider the gendered identities of Iraqi women but will also pay attention to the ways in which their gendered identities intersect with other social identities, such as class, religion and nation. The answers to these questions will contribute to forming alternative knowledge by recognising the complexities of Iraqi women's experiences and positions, thus disrupting binaries produced by US foreign policy narratives, which are currently the focus of much of the existing literature. Moreover, the thesis will explore Iraqi women's understandings of security in order to contribute to Feminist Security Studies, and it challenges conventional ideas of security, freedom and agency by offering a context-based analysis on security. I will argue for feminist scholars to take seriously the approach of standpoint theory, intersectionality and narrative analysis to better understand women's security and agency.

Chapter Two: Theoretical framework: Feminist Standpoint Theory

This chapter presents the main analytical framework and the concepts that are employed in this thesis to analyse the narratives in US hegemonic representations of Iraqi women since 2003. This thesis situates itself within the field of Feminist International Relations (IR) and the sub-field of Feminist Security Studies, with epistemological underpinnings in Standpoint Feminism.

The theoretical framework I employ draws insights from postcolonialism and intersectional feminism in addition to Feminist Security Studies to complement Feminist Standpoint Theory. While these theoretical approaches differ in certain respects, they share an essential overlap in their emphasis of the inclusion of women's experiences.

In broad terms, Feminist IR scholars do not practise a uniform approach (Wibben, 2004), but are united in challenging IR's basic tenets, as rooted in Realism, which centre on studying powerful states and 'the maintenance of hierarchy among states' (Weldon, 2006, p. 67). A Realist model assumes an underlying positivist epistemology that prioritizes objective truth and disregards individual subjectivity. However, this epistemological approach inherently dismisses marginalized groups' viewpoints, which creates a partial way of studying IR. As Gillian Youngs (2004, p. 87) argues, 'International Relations as a field focuses on power [...] failing to take account of gender offers a partial account of power' (see also, Elshtain, 1987; Enloe, 1989; Tickner, 1992; Peterson & Runyan, 1993; Sylvester, 1994; Zalewski & Parpart, 1998, amongst others). Cynthia Enloe argues that the 'the personal is international,' in order to point to both the role of gender in structuring international politics as well as the impact of international politics on gender itself. She (1989) famously asked 'where are the women in international politics?', going on to elaborate how studying women's lives through feminist approaches can reveal the dynamics of power relations in International Politics. For example, Enloe (1989, p. 4) states:

Feminist-informed investigators pay attention to low-status secretarial women because they learned that paying attention to (listening to, taking seriously the observations of) women in these scarcely noticed jobs can pull back the curtain on the political workings of lofty state affairs.

Enloe's approach thus speaks to the current project's aim of foregrounding the experiences and knowledge of Iraqi women who are in a position that

Enloe would regard as being on the ‘bottom rungs’, that is, those who ‘lack public power and [are] the object[s] of other people’s power’ (Enloe, 2004, p. 21).

Feminist Standpoint Theory

This section will provide an overview of Feminist Standpoint Theory and will further discuss the its limitation by highlighting its existing tensions with other theories. I shall also elaborate on how my project will overcome these tensions and make use of the associated theoretical developments in order to ensure this project’s epistemological coherence.

Feminist Standpoint Theory first emerged in the 1970s “as a feminist critical theory about relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power” (Harding, 2004 p.1). Standpoint Feminists such as Nancy Hartsock (1983), Mary E. Hawkesworth (1989), Dorothy Smith (1990), Sandra Harding (1991, 1993) and Helen Longino (1990) were responding to mainstream academics who privilege knowledge that discounts the experiences and knowledges of women, in as much as the research at the time was rooted in academic work dominated by men and masculinist theoretical and epistemological approaches. As Harding (2004, p.4) notes:

the research disciplines and the public policy institutions that depended upon them permitted no conceptual frameworks in which women as a group—or, rather, as groups located in different class, racial, ethnic, and sexual locations in local, national, and global social relations— became the subjects—the authors—of knowledge. Could women (in various diverse collectivities) become subjects of knowledge?

Feminist Standpoint Theorists have addressed the question of the validity of the knowledge associated with traditional scientific methods of claiming ‘truths’. For example, scholars such as J. Ann Tickner (2005, p.6) have noted that traditional scientific epistemologies and methods omit any serious and unbiased consideration of gender and women’s experiences:

While not rejecting in principle the use of quantitative data, feminists have recognized how past behavioral realities have been publicly constituted in state generated indicators in biased gendered ways, using data that does not adequately reflect the reality of women’s lives and the unequal structures of power within which they are situated.

This suggests that scientific knowledge must also be questioned regarding its supposed “objective knowledge” and the truth to claims about women’s lives.

For this reason, Donna Haraway (1988, p. 583) advocates the idea that knowledge should be socially situated, as ‘feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge’; she thereby emphasises the importance of context. This idea is further developed by Sandra Harding who introduced the idea of ‘strong objectivity’ as a means to reject the flawed assumption that there can ever be value-neutral knowledge. She instead believes that:

Knowledge claims are always socially situated and the failure by dominant groups critically and systematically to interrogate their advantaged social situation and the effect of advantages on their beliefs leaves their social situation a scientifically and epistemologically disadvantaged one for generating knowledge (Harding, 1993, p. 54).

Dorothy Smith (1990, p. 28) further develops the idea of situated knowledge by establishing the “sociology for women” project whose aim was to embody the experiences of the “everyday world” as located knowledge:

The standpoint of women situates the sociological subject prior to the entry into the abstracted conceptual mode, vested in texts, that is the order of the relations of ruling. From this standpoint, we know the everyday world through the particularities of our local practices and activities, in the actual places of our work and the actual time it takes. In making the everyday world problematic we also problematize the everyday localized practices of the objectified forms of knowledge organizing our everyday world.

Smith’s standpoint feminist strategy of “problematizing the everyday” exposes objectified and dominant forms of knowledge to understand the particularities of local practices. Smith influenced Feminist IR scholars to adopt her approach, and indeed we can trace her advice in the work of scholars such as Cynthia Enloe, who writes about women’s everyday experiences in the field of global politics (1989).

Standpoint Feminist Theorists also argue that those who have been systematically excluded and marginalized by dominant knowledge production are in a position of “epistemic privilege”. As Alison Wylie (2012, p.47) explains:

[those] who are marginalized or oppressed under conditions of systemic inequity may, in fact, be better knowers, in a number of respects, than those who are socially or economically privileged. Their epistemic advantage arises from the kinds of experience they

are likely to have, situated as they are, and the resources available to them for understanding this experience.

Nancy Hartsock further develops this idea in her own work, and she provides one of the earliest applications of Feminist Standpoint Theory. Her insights into women's distinct perspectives of reality were inspired by Marxist theories in the sense that the proletarian standpoint should be privileged over that of the bourgeoisie on the basis of the former's clear perspectives of their own material conditions. Hartsock (1987, p. 175) further noted:

an analysis which begins from the sexual division of labor [...] could form the basis for an analysis of the real structures of women's oppression, an analysis which would not require that one sever biology from society, nature from culture, an analysis which would expose the ways women both participate in and oppose their own subordination.

The essentials of Hartsock's argument can be found in Tickner's (1992, p. 16) work, which recognizes that 'those who are oppressed have a better understanding of their sources of oppression than their oppressors.' My project responds to this important notion by privileging the knowledge and experiences of Iraqi women over both the foreign policy narratives of the US as well as the prevailing assumptions in the current corpus of scholarly research in the field of Feminist IR. Furthermore, In **Chapter Five**, I will demonstrate that in privileging Iraqi women's knowledge, we should be able to understand the concept of "security" from their standpoints and what it means to them. This is important if we are seriously seeking to understand their post-conflict circumstances. I have discussed 'security', because it is a recurring theme that emerges from the interviews. The adoption of Feminist standpoint epistemology has led me to focus on the themes that were important to the interviewees as it privileges the capture of marginalized knowledge.

Moreover, I argue that it is important to understand power relations from the perspectives of the oppressed as "the epistemic advantage that may arise even under social conditions that are likely to suppress evidence is the opportunity to understand how relations of power actually work." (Rolin, 2009, p. 224) In **Chapter Four**, I discuss how understanding women's narratives regarding their positionalities in relation to power (US foreign narratives) allows us to understand their agencies and power in complex ways, and further to challenge binary assumptions made by scholars and US politicians, which leads to these women's empowerment as their narratives hold the power to disrupt such binary assumptions. My project seeks to understand power relations in order to be able to challenge them.

Standpoint feminist theory has also discussed how it has the potential to contribute to social justice projects. As Harding (2004, p.10) explains:

Standpoint theory's focus on the historical and social locatedness of knowledge projects and on the way collective political and intellectual work can transform a source of oppression into a source of knowledge and potential liberation, makes a distinctive contribution to social justice projects as well as to our understanding of preconditions for the production of knowledge.

Thus, Iraqi women's experiences are not to be considered as merely matters of opinion or of existing without emancipatory potential. Rather, when we begin to think of their experiences as "standpoints", then we are offered, as Alison Jaggar (1997, p. 193) puts it, insights into the "mechanisms of domination and envisioning freer ways to live." I use terms such as 'disruption' and 'agency' as conceptual tools by which to understand Iraqi women as subjects, rather than objects, of knowledge and to recognize that their narratives are a source of empowered and alternative knowledge. Iraqi women's narratives will enable them to define their experiences instead of having others define it for them, where the act of defining one's own experiences can be considered a form of 'agency'. In doing so, Iraqi women can 'disrupt' representations about themselves in dominant US narratives because they oppose the "objectification as the Other" (Hill-Collins, 2000, p. 101)

Although Standpoint Feminism, in its favouring of alternative forms of knowledge, provides an important approach to highlighting women's experiences, it comes with certain epistemological limitations. Post-structural and postmodern feminists have been among the most critical of Standpoint Feminist projects. For example, Susan Hekman (1997, p. 348) criticizes Standpoint Feminists for attempting to define the nature of reality and for making claims of truth. She states:

Despite their significant differences, all of these accounts share the conviction that Feminist standpoint is rooted in a 'reality' that is the opposite of the abstract conceptual world inhabited by men, particularly the men of the ruling class, and that in this reality lies the truth of the human condition.

Unsurprisingly, Standpoint Theorists such as Harding believe that Hekman mischaracterized their work. Harding (1997, p. 382) explains that, "it seems to me that Hekman distorts the central project of standpoint theorists when she characterizes it as one of figuring out how to justify the truth of feminist claims to more accurate accounts of 'reality.' Rather, it is relations between power and knowledge that concern these thinkers." In my thesis, I will not attempt to claim that Iraqi women's narratives are somehow indicative of a

more accurate form of reality but will rather focus on the point these narratives can complicate power relations.

I have discussed the relationship between power and knowledge by highlighting how the concept of “Occidentalism”, as discussed in **Chapter Four**, is a type of embodied knowledge of their experiences and positionalities that complicate power relations and dismantle the reductive Orientalist us versus them binary. Decoding theory will help operationalize Occidentalism by demonstrating that women do not only hold an oppositional position, but indeed hold many others. This, in turn, helps us rethink power relations in more complex terms rather than in a simplistic binary manner.

Post-structural and postmodern Feminists have also accused Standpoint Feminists of essentialism and ‘assuming a single coherent female subject’ (Hansen, 2015, p. 20) by advocating the idea that all women share common experiences, thereby homogenizing the experiences of women. By contrast, post-structural feminists argue that women as a category are ‘only constituted in discourse. This means they believe that there is no extra-discursive biological gender that stands apart from the social constitution of femininity and masculinity’ (Hansen, 2015, p. 21).

This project will only adopt one key post-structuralist concept, namely that identities are constructed through discourse (Foucault, 1972). This is because the adoption of a post-structural feminist approach would dismiss the otherwise valid idea that women are not only constructed through language, but also by lived experiences. As the project emphasizes the need to focus on women’s experiences, adopting a post-structural feminist approach would ultimately prove irreconcilable, because: ‘if ‘women’ are not a subject that can be referred to, but ‘only’ constituted in discourse, it becomes difficult if not impossible to speak of the structural inequalities that women face’ (Hansen, 2015, p. 22).

In addition to this, focussing on a post-structural approach dismisses the significance of considering bodies as embodied knowledge when shaping and reshaping stories and places: “people recreate and reconstruct social relations through lived experiences: experiences that are contingent upon their actual, material locations,” [and these experiences] “reverberate back through a larger social context” (Amy Mills, 2012, p. 780)

Post-structural approaches also dismisses the importance of studying women’s lived experiences are impacted by the state and social structures: Hawksworth (1989, p.556) argues that “there is a modicum of permanence within the fluidity of the life-world: traditions, practices, relationships, institutes and structures persist and can have profound consequences for individual life prospects, constraining opportunities for growth

development, resisting reconstitution, frustrating efforts toward discretion and control.” Standpoint feminist theory scholars argue that focusing on lived experiences can bring out the impact of the state on women and marginalized lives:

Standpoint feminism shift the study from abstract states to how real living women are impacted by economic and security structures within and across state boundaries. This involves a double shift of focus from mainstream IR and rationalist feminism in that it moves from states to gender and from abstract structures to concrete individuals. Standpoint feminists argue further that one should focus in particular on marginalised women as these are particularly disadvantaged, yet systematically overlooked. (Hansen, 2015, p.19)

Throughout the thesis, I have resisted theorizing from abstraction by grounding my research with women’s lived experiences of (in)securities and their positionalities in relation to dominant power in order to foreground their knowledge of how the 2003 invasion of Iraq has impacted their lives.

This thesis nevertheless acknowledges the concerns raised by Post-structural Feminists that caution against the risk of essentializing women’s experiences. Indeed, I shall track the commentary of Susan Hekman who, in critiquing the Standpoint Feminists’ essentializing approach, highlights the importance of recognizing “differences”:

Originally, feminist standpoint theorists claimed that the standpoint of women offers a privileged vantage point for knowledge. But if the differences among women are taken seriously and we accept the conclusion that women occupy many different standpoints and thus inhabit many realities, this thesis must be re-examined. (Hekman, 1997, p.349)

The project responds to Hekman’s concerns about taking different standpoints seriously. This thesis will therefore not merely capture counter-hegemonic positions, and consequently will avoid the binary and homogenous standpoint approach that favour recognizing differences. My project operationalizes this by highlighting women’s pluralistic “decoding positions”, which include the concept of the hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional positions, to operationalize our understanding of women’s positionalities in relation to dominant power. This is explored further in **Chapter Four**, with the aim of charting differences between women in terms of their attitudes towards US involvement in the 2003 Iraq invasion.

Postcolonial feminists have extended post-structural critique by focusing on how Western women standpoints have universalized the experiences of

third-world women and have propounded the myth of the “global sisterhood”:

The criticism on an epistemological level is aimed at the creation of global hegemony of Western scholarship by producing (ethnocentric) universal knowledge which negates cross-cultural differences. Women as an analytical category is treated as an already constituted group (Gouws, 1996, p.72)

Capturing pluralistic accounts of women’s experiences is important to postcolonial scholars and indeed to my own project. In fact, even standpoint feminist scholars themselves acknowledge this as being an issue that needs to be resolved; as Allison Jaggar (2004, p.64) writes: “white/Anglo women who try to do theory with women of color inevitably disrupt the dialogue. Before they can contribute to a collective dialogue, they need to ‘know the text’, to have become familiar with an alternative way of viewing the world.”

Another concern shared by Postcolonial theorists is linked to the issue of representation, and accordingly they often ask questions such as: ‘who has the authority to represent reality’ [or] ‘who must be silenced in order that these representations prevail?’ (Yeatman, 1994, p.191). I will be mindful about the issue of representation by adopting appropriate postcolonial principles such as speaking and listening to women. (Spivak 1988)

This project acknowledges the concerns raised by post-structural, postmodern and postcolonial scholars and has addressed them. The project overcomes the risk of essentialism by recognizing the complexities and diversity of women’s experiences, drawing on postcolonial and intersectional feminism. Specifically, it adopts Patricia Hill-Collins’ (1990) and Kimberle William Crenshaw’s (1991) intersectional approaches. Intersectionality is an important and targeted tool that can help to refine the standpoint epistemological approach, as it serves to recognise the local and specific conditions in which power operates and upon which representations are drawn. Intersectional techniques highlight the different ways in which women may identify themselves (not only as women, but also as members of particular national, ethnic, and religious groups, in addition to their social class backgrounds). As a result, this thesis adopts intersectionality so as to acknowledge that women may be oppressed (or privileged) in a number of different and simultaneous ways, e.g., through class, race, or age. This helps to determine the experience of living as a woman in any given society as well as underscoring the differences amongst women. As Crenshaw (1991, p. 1245) notes, ‘focus[ing] on the intersections of race and gender [...] highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed’. The benefits of thinking about the concept of intersectionality, Crenshaw (1991, p. 1299) argues, are

that: ‘through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics’.

Patricia Hill-Collins sought to develop Feminist Standpoint Theory in a manner that was resolutely intersectional. Maintaining sensitivity towards the critique of essentialism, she argues “despite African-American women’s potential power to reveal new insights about the matrix of domination, Black women’s standpoint is only one angle of vision” (Hill-Collins, 1990, p. 234). To address the intersection of gender and race, she develops the concept of ‘matrix of domination’ which helps to operationalize intersectionality (1990, p. 18):

Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice. In contrast, the matrix of domination refers to how these intersecting oppressions are actually organized. Regardless of the particular intersections involved, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression.

She argues that the matrix of domination consists of four domains: the structural domains consist of institutions such as law and religion, which establish the parameters of power relations; the disciplinary domain, however, manages oppression through control and surveillance by bureaucratic organizations. The hegemonic domain ‘deals with ideology, culture and consciousness’ (Hill-Collins, 1990, p. 285), whereas the interpersonal domain influences everyday life. Hill-Collins (1990, p. 230) writes:

In essence, each group identifies the oppression with which it feels most comfortable as being fundamental and classifies all others as being of lesser importance. Oppression is filled with such contradictions because these approaches fail to recognize that a matrix of domination contains few pure victims or oppressors. Each individual derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression which frame everyone’s lives.

To recognise that Othering and oppression occur in different but interrelated ways demands that any critical approach be intersectional. In this thesis, I shall demonstrate that the matrix of domination will help the project consider Iraqi women’s security and narratives in a more comprehensive and appropriate manner. Deploying the idea of the matrix of domination helps us recognize that there are different forms of oppression and that each Iraqi woman will have a different personal relationship with them. This further helps us to better locate their source of oppression and de-

essentialise women's experiences by appreciating different situated knowledges. For example, some Iraqi women were concerned about their loss of class status, but each had a unique story about why that mattered to them and what their source of oppression or insecurity was.

Meanwhile, drawing on postcolonial feminist approaches will help me to become attentive to the ways in which women's experiences are shaped by multiple axes of power (e.g., patriarchy, imperialism, racism) at the local, national and international levels. Postcolonial Feminism not only focusses on gendered inequalities, but is also concerned with global hierarchies and deprioritizing Western-centric knowledge in favour of embracing the true diversity in women's experiences (Mishra, 2013). The recognition that not every woman is oppressed in the same way means that postcolonial Feminist scholars also object to essentializing women (see Mohanty, 1984).

However, this thesis does not intend to create a new binary of Iraqi women's knowledge versus Western hegemonic knowledge; rather, it will be mindful of these differences in order to achieve a better understanding of their different knowledges in order to create solidarity between Eastern and Western societies rather than creating divisive divides. As Mohanty (2003, p. 226) argues:

Differences are never just "differences." In knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining. The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully. It is this intellectual move that allows for my concern for women of different communities and identities to build coalitions and solidarities across borders.

In this respect, this thesis seeks to respond to Abu Lughod's (2002, p. 783) challenge that: 'we need to develop [...] a serious appreciation of differences among women in the world—as products of different histories, expressions of different circumstances, and manifestations of differently structured desires'.

Part of the issue of not appreciating differences is linked to methodology; namely, we need a theoretical framework that contributes to a critique of liberal feminism and its assumption of a 'global sisterhood' (Mohanty, 1984) which ignores particularities and differences in favour of assuming all women have shared essentially equal experiences and struggles.

Postcolonial feminist scholars have also highlighted the problem of including marginalized voices. The question of 'can the subaltern speak?'

emerged from Gayatri Spivak's (1988) concern about how research was conducted by the 'subaltern studies' group, led by Ranjit Guha, who criticized Western scholars for ignoring the subaltern classes (1997). *Subaltern Studies aimed to give voice* to marginalized people who have experienced colonialism in order to assert their own historical narratives (Guha 1997). In this way, there are overlaps between standpoint feminist theory and the subaltern history group in terms of critiquing dominant knowledge for its exclusion of the experiences of marginalized groups. In 'Can the subaltern speak?' Gayatri Spivak (1988) took issue with the subaltern studies group for unintentionally silencing the 'Third World' Other by mediating the voice of the subaltern through these scholars' own frameworks of knowledge. Instead of this, Spivak (1987, p. 135) asserts that, 'the academic feminist must learn to learn from them [...] instead of correcting the experiences of disenfranchised women with our superior theory and enlightened compassion'. For example, it is vital not only to add women's voices to our scholarship but to also consider how women's experiences may challenge the concepts and categories of dominant knowledge, including Western feminist knowledge, such as reducing the cause of women's oppression to patriarchy or reducing Iraqi women to being the 'third world woman'. This approach can prevent us from understanding women on their own terms. In order to move away from this approach, we must prioritize situated knowledge and allow marginalized women to narrate their own experiences to avoid mitigating voices.

Despite some differences, standpoint feminism and postcolonial feminism may complement one another, for both are interested in capturing knowledge produced by women who are otherwise (mis)represented in terms of global knowledge production. Chowdhry and Nair (2004, p. 13) note that much postcolonial theory 'challenges the epistemic, ideological, and political authority of Western and elite knowledge'. I make use of standpoint theorists such as Harding (1993), Haraway (1988), and Tickner (1992), whose 'socially situated knowledge' approach seeks to prioritize how marginalized women convey their own experiences. They simultaneously avoid universalizing women's experiences by paying close attention to individual experiences and by being mindful of Mohanty's (1989) advice against categorization and the myth of the 'global sisterhood', and by further paying attention not only to gender inequalities but also those other inequalities produced through the processes of imperialism, capitalism, and sectarianism.

Conclusion

My project adopts the epistemological approach of standpoint feminism and combines insights from intersectional and postcolonial Feminist IR in order

to build a theoretical framework that foregrounds women's experiences and knowledge. As such, even when scholars contest US narratives and direct attention towards the insidious power relations at work therein, it is nonetheless US tropes and ideas that are allowed to dominate any discussion; therefore, hegemonic knowledge production is not sufficiently challenged. In line with much of feminist and, particularly, standpoint feminist epistemology, this project seeks to redress this imbalance by recording and centring Iraqi women's experiences and self-representations. This thesis aims to reveal how Iraqi women's narratives challenge US representations and narratives about them. The project relies on intersectionality to acknowledge differences between Iraqi women and to highlight the complexity of their experiences and their attitudes towards the US.

Chapter Three: Data Collection and Methods

In this chapter, I shall first discuss my primary source: the collection of my original empirical data on Iraqi women in the form of in-person interviews which I conducted on the ground in Jordan. This involved gaining access to some of the most disenfranchised groups of Iraqi women in the world. The collation of this material was crucial to cultivating pluralistic meaning and inclusivity. This, in turn, is central to underpinning the project's aim of foregrounding alternative knowledge. I also lay out the purpose, process and limitations of conducting interviews as my method. This is carried out in a self-reflexive manner in order to enhance objectivity and make visible the power relations between the researcher and researched, in an effort to minimise the effects of such power dynamics.

The analyses of the interviews with Iraqi women were undertaken using a narrative analysis approach. This is because, I argue, a narrative approach is fundamentally the most suitable mechanism for enabling the free play of meaning to surface. This was of particular help in interpreting these individuals' intersectional identities and experiences. It is also the best tool for producing alternative knowledge.

The project's ontological direction is interpretivist in nature. I describe how this has complemented my epistemological feminist and postcolonial approaches. I discuss with particular focus marrying the idea of the feminist ethos of 'objectivity' with interpretivism, arguing that interpreting data as socially situated knowledge coheres with the goal of 'listening to' Iraqi women's voices. I also highlight issues of hearing marginalized 'voices' and address how I treated this problem in practice.

On researching marginalized women

Interview process

As women have so regularly been written out of recent history, Iraqi women in particular, interviews constituted a method to resist any such process. Interviews enabled the project to engage directly with the experiences of Iraqi women and to identify their agency, offering a more pluralistic account of Iraqi women's experiences than that constructed by US politicians—or indeed by most Western scholars. This approach is needed because, as Cynthia Enloe (2009, pp. ix–x) notes, there is a danger of occluding attention to real Iraqi women when discussing the Iraq War and its legacy:

Americans and British men and women say things like 'Iraq should teach us a lesson' or 'Iraq is the reason he killed his wife.' As if Iraq with its history of ancient civilisations, achievements, British

colonial rule, multi-ethnic marriages [...] would be squeezed into Iraq, a newly blown small glass bottle of American and British angst. One way to release [...] Iraq from its currently hardening confines of Iraq is [...] by taking seriously the historical and political lives and ideas of women [so that] we can inoculate ourselves the temptation to treat any society simplistically or, worse, narcissistically.

Thus, I sought to resist treating Iraqi society simplistically and instead have included women's ideas and experiences in order to establish a microcosmic view of post-2003 Iraq as narrated by Iraqi women. I helped to address the scarcity of pluralistic knowledge about Iraqi women by carrying out interviews with them, directly. Doing so not only created a new collection of original empirical data. Moreover, unlike existing studies of Iraqi women, the women interviewed for this project constitute some of the most marginalized Iraqi women because of their displacement and political and economic vulnerability.

Due to the deteriorating security situation in Iraq during 2015, the year in which I carried out my fieldwork, I was unable to travel to Iraq but instead conducted my fieldwork in Jordan, which hosts a large Iraqi refugee population (Al-Qdah & Lacroix, 2010, p. 523).

The majority of women I interviewed experienced marginalization as refugees in Jordan. For example, many of the women I interviewed were unemployed. This was not by choice, but rather because Jordanian laws prevent Iraqi refugees from activities such as working. According to a 2009 (Georgetown University Law Center, Human Rights Institute, p. 2) report on the situation of Iraqi refugees in Jordan:

Iraqi refugees rarely enjoy legal protection and long-term self-sufficiency in Jordan. The overwhelming majority of Iraqi refugees interviewed in Jordan could not secure legal employment in the formal economy. Not all Iraqi refugees are registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which compromises their ability to gain access to assistance. Moreover, most Iraqi refugees in Jordan do not have access to adequate legal protections such as residency, work permits, and police protection, and are discriminated against, extorted, and abused as a result.

A more recent study conducted in 2013 suggests that the situation of Iraqi refugees in Jordan has not improved, although it indicates that wealthy Iraqis have some advantages over poor Iraqis:

[R]esidence permit is only allowed to Iraqis if they deposit and maintain large sums of money in Jordan, or meet stringent

employment requirements[...]Work permits are almost prohibitively difficult due to requirements of active residency [...]About 80% of wealthy Iraqis have work permits compared with only 22% of the poorest [...] Limitations on legal employment not only exacerbate the already difficult situation of refugees but also largely prevent them from claiming the agency to improve their own situation themselves (Gibson, 2015, p. 201).

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has tried to respond to the situation of Iraqi refugees, but a 2013 study suggests that aid provided by UNHCR to Iraqi refugees is decreasing. Moreover, some aid agencies are redirecting their aid to Syrian refugees:

Many Iraqi refugees have dependence on aid; 40% registered with the UNHCR live below poverty level, and the need for aid is growing as Iraqis who may have come over with funds now after years see those funds running out, yet aid is decreasing or even stopping [...] Some aid agencies, such as the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) cut funding for Iraqi refugees altogether, in favor of Syrian refugees. Even financial assistance to Iraqi refugees from the UNHCR is being reduced [...] Organizations cannot keep up with Iraqi refugee need due to funding limitations (Gibson, 2015, p. 203).

I have interviewed a few wealthy Iraqis, but many of the women I spoke to were recent refugees who escaped persecution from Daesh and militias and are experiencing hardship. Thus, I strived to capture women from different class backgrounds.

The sample of interviews with Iraqi women collected was sufficiently broad to encapsulate different experiences amongst Iraqi women. The sample consists of interviews with 19 Iraqi women. I included young Iraqi women who were born in Jordan due to their parents fleeing Iraq from previous conflicts. These women, despite being born in Jordan, still identified as Iraqi and maintained strong family ties in Iraq. The breakdown of the sample composition is as follows. I interviewed women with different levels of religiosity and who belong to different sects, religions and ethnicities. This included nine Sunnis, one of who still resides in Iraq and was interviewed on Skype. I interviewed two Shia women, three Christians, three Sabaeans and two women from the Islamic faith who did not wish to identify as either Shia or Sunni. My sample captured further diversity amongst Iraqi women as I included women who were employed and unemployed, women with university degrees and those with only secondary school degrees. I also included women with different marital status, some were married with children and some were single. The sample also included women with different political and ideological orientations. This diverse sample helped

me explore questions such as how each woman's backgrounds link to the sources of violence inside Iraq and the different phases of violence since 2003.

It was important to interview women from minority backgrounds, as amplifying diverse voices is central to my project's aim of producing new pluralistic knowledge of women to complicate and challenge existing ideas of women's agencies, identities and experiences. The women from minority backgrounds I interviewed included Iraqi Sabaeans-Mandaeans (Sabaeans refers to their religious affiliation and Mandaeans is their ethnicity). This ethno-religious group face extinction as a people; in 2003 their numbers were between 50–60,000 (International Religious Freedom, 2010, p. 68). That number has since dwindled:

Since the outbreak of violence in 2003, most Sabean-Mandaeans have either fled the country or been killed. Today, there are fewer than 5,000 remaining in Iraq. As their small community is scattered throughout the world, the Sabean-Mandaeans' ancient language, culture and religion face the threat of extinction' (Minority Group International, 2017).

Iraqi Christians have faced similar fate to that of Sabaeans in terms of withering population. In 2003 alone, the number of Christians residing in Iraq was halved. The Iraqi Christian population went from being 1.3 million to approximately 500,000, defined as those residing within the bounds of the Iraqi state: 'Christian leaders [warn] that the result of this flight maybe 'the end of Christianity in Iraq'' (US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2010, p. 68). These data were recorded in 2010 before the emergence of Daesh. It is very likely that this figure has decreased even farther.

The interviewees were selected through a snowballing method. This involved selecting a few participants that I, the researcher, identified, or who were recommended by personal contacts. These candidates were then asked to introduce other potential interviewees (with the option to decline if they so wished). (Noy, 2008, pp. 330-331). This ensured that interviewees had a strong connection with the project and an informed understanding of how the data would be used, without leading interviewees to focus only on particular themes and questions.

The story of how I gained access to interviewing marginalized women is important to share, both for source documentation purposes as well as to adhere to the feminist ethos of objectivity.

My journey began by connecting with a family friend, an Iraqi woman running her own charity providing support for Iraqi women and families. Subsequently, through her, I managed to gain access to and interview

women who were receiving aid from her. The network then expanded to include one of her friends, her daughter, and herself, all of whom identified as Sunni Muslim.

I came to realise that this charity only offered support for Muslims who were mainly Sunni. As a result, I sought to overcome this issue of restricted access to other ethno-religious Iraqi women by asking the Iraqi women I met through the charity to introduce me to women they knew who were from Shia and minority backgrounds. I was told that it was not easy to find Shias and minority groups. I had expected some degree of difficulty with meeting Iraqis of minority backgrounds, but I was surprised by the fact that it was challenging to meet Shias, because they form the majority of Iraqis. The UNHCR in 2007 reported that of the Iraqis in Jordan, Sunni Muslim Iraqi refugees comprised 68% and only 17 % are reported to be Shias. (UNHCR, 2007, p. 3). I researched more into this issue and found that: 'Many Iraqis entering Jordan at the border and airport reported being asked whether they were Sunni or Shiite. Shiites were more likely to be turned away' (Rosen, 2010, p. 17). Thus, Shias were likely to face sectarian discrimination. Nevertheless, one Sunni Iraqi I met was gracious to introduce me to her Shia friend. From that point, the network grew; I was then introduced to her family, and thereby gained access to interview Shia women.

Practical difficulties arose at several points, such as when it came to search for minority groups. This was because none of the Iraqi women I spoke to personally knew Iraqis from minority backgrounds. One woman I met suggested I meet with her male Iraqi friend she knew, who himself was an Iraqi refugee living in Jordan and was knowledgeable about Iraqi enclaves where impoverished Iraqi refugees from minority backgrounds reside. I was advised to be chaperoned by him as he thought it was unsafe to wander around by myself. I agreed to that arrangement, and we proceeded together to visit several houses to find out whether there were any women willing to take part in my research.

Upon arriving at these homes, as a result of this process, the families we visited were met by a person speaking a familiar Iraqi dialect (the Iraqi man who accompanied me). This was essential, because it made them at least willing to speak to us. I was introduced to these women as a Kuwaiti Arab researcher from a British university, who was interested in conducting research on Iraqi women's experiences since the 2003 invasion. Some women were wary of me and refused to be interviewed. In line with research ethics, I respected their wishes and continued on my search for willing participants.

During my journey to areas in which there was a high density of refugees living, the willing participants whom I met were all Sabaeans. Little

attention is paid to this community because they constitute a small percentage of the Iraqi population. Indeed, as previously mentioned, there are less than 5,000 Sabaeans in Iraq and much fewer in Jordan today.

That said, in order to broaden my sample and amplify other marginalized voices, I decided it was important to meet more minority women in addition to Sabaeans. Knowing this, the man who accompanied me suggested speaking to church workers about the possibility of meeting Iraqi Christians. I confirmed this idea and, as a consequence, we went off to visit a church where I happened to encounter a nun. She was very pleasant to talk to and was happy to help me once I made my research aims clear to her. She put me in touch with an Iraqi Christian family that agreed to be interviewed by me. One of the Christians regarded Christian Iraqis as a vulnerable group and did not see a way of ever returning to Iraq; she expressed concern over her fellow Christian Iraqis ever returning to Iraq. This is consistent with a picture of Iraqi Christians comprising an endangered population. As a result, documenting their experiences took on a higher degree of significance.

It was certainly challenging in many respects to interview Iraqi female refugees, but these complex measures were always done within the ethical boundaries and advice given to me by my university around consent and vulnerability. I did this by explaining very clearly what my project was about and asked them for their consent to take part in my research. I also ensured that the interviewees did not need to answer questions they felt uncomfortable to discuss and that they could ask me to stop the interview at any point without any further questioning.

Sample size method

As a study of Iraqi women that aimed to engage with theory through empirical work, the project does not attempt to claim that its sample is representative in the way that would be necessary for a research process based on a positivist epistemology. Instead, it aims to establish the important conceptual point that pluralistic accounts of Iraqi women's experiences in order to highlight their knowledge. It is important to recognise that no qualitative research or purposeful sampling could claim to be comprehensive, whatever the sample size. Cuadraz and Uttal (1999, p. 166) argue:

Larger methods only falsely suggest that the comparisons are more inferentially valid. These larger samples are no closer to allowing inferential generalizations than smaller samples (whether the sample is 32 or 100) if they were initially collected from maximum variation or snowball sampling techniques [...] For in-depth interviewing, the claim of societal significance and social validity needs to be made through analytical process, not because of sampling method.

The project thus attempted to provide a detailed understanding of Iraqi women's lived experiences without spreading its attention too thinly. One could not hope to capture the infinite variety of these experiences.

A suitable and practical sample size was selected that was sufficient to capture the demographics of Iraqi women, yet small enough to enable in-depth interviews. The size of the sample was also determined by the difficulties of gaining access within the time period of this study, which, in turn, was determined by financial resources (especially as my fieldwork was self-funded). Moreover, this study was limited by the amount of time I was able to spend in the field and the difficulties of access.

Interview format

The interviews were designed to enable Iraqi women to narrate their own experiences and express their own self-representations. The research design recognised that some women might have little or no interest in discussing the themes identified within the literature review (in relation to US foreign policy narratives and orientalist representations of Iraqi women), and it was crucial not to influence them with leading questions. Instead, their narratives had to be allowed to emerge. As such, to identify what was and was not important to these women, interviews consisted of semi-structured questions, starting with interviewees' backgrounds to build confidence and allow each woman to narrate her own experiences and identities, before opening the conversation up to include political and social issues and perceptions of the US.

Semi-structured questions were adopted in order to avoid leading questions and ensure interviewees had scope to make their own autonomous responses, without straying from the central concerns of the research or producing data that was so varied as to be difficult to compare. While there was a list of questions to cover in order to produce narratives that were comparable, there was also the option of follow-up questions to pursue any unforeseen or unclear lines of discussion, so that each individual woman was not confined to predetermined questions and topics. There was therefore no time limit to each interview so that each woman was under no pressure to talk any more or less than she chose.

Each interview was conducted with informed consent in a place of the interviewee's choosing, so that she felt comfortable and secure. They were recorded, with the interviewee's consent, for future transcription and repeated assessment. Each interviewee was anonymized to protect their identity and confidentiality.

Questions that related to background, to establish factors relevant to the project's framework of intersectionality and the project's aim of capturing pluralistic experiences of Iraqi women, include:

1. Where and when were you born?
2. Did you study at university (if so, what and where?) or undertake any further training after leaving school?
3. Are you religious? If so, what faith do you follow?
4. Do you plan to return to Iraq?

The collection of biographical details about each woman enabled me to understand individual women's narratives in relation to their security.

Questions that relate to the US hegemonic narrative about Iraq and Iraqi women after 2003 included:

1. What do you think of women's rights in Iraq over the last decade?
2. Did you vote in the Iraqi parliamentary elections?
3. Do you think Iraq is a democracy?
4. What would freedom for Iraqi women look like?
5. Do you feel that the Obama administration treated Iraqi women in the same way as or differently from the Bush administration?
6. Is the situation of women in Iraq improving or deteriorating?

These questions helped determine what themes, if any, Iraqi women prioritized or had an investment in, to reveal the positions they held. This provided useful data for comparison with existing scholarship on US representations of Iraqi women, women and conflict/post-conflict reconstruction, as well as informing an understanding of the relationship between intersectional factors and positionality.

Interviewees were not confined just to these themes. Questions that made broader discussions and personal interests possible included:

1. Are there any important issues relating to women in Iraq, or yourself, that you would like to discuss?
2. Is there anything you would like to add

Limitations

One limitation to the interviews was that the demographic of interviewees was restricted to those living in urban areas. Given the limitations of time and resources, as well as of safety considerations, it was not feasible to interview women in Iraq due to safety issues. The project instead sought to minimise any bias in the sample towards middle-class urban women by considering these interviews in light of existing empirical research on Iraqi working-class women (Al-Jawaheri, 2008; Efrati, 2012), and by using intersectionality to recognise these limitations and to circumscribe the claims that the project made. As previously established, no qualitative sample can ever claim to be representative or comprehensive, so the effort

to acknowledge limitations within the participating demographics affected the conclusions drawn rather than undermined them.

Another limitation of the interviews concerned issues of memory: the invasion of Iraq occurred well over ten years ago and so accurate or consistent recall on the part of the interviewees was unlikely. This did not comprise a significant obstacle as what was at stake was not some objective insight into the 'true' nature of the invasion, which would be a false premise, but rather how Iraqi women presently remember the invasion and narrate their experiences. Daniel Schacter (2001, p. 9), a leading influence on oral historians, argues that memories are not to be thought of as:

Snapshots [which] if stored properly could be retrieved in precisely the same condition in which they were put away [but understood instead as a process in which] we extract key elements from our experiences and store them. We then recreate and reconstruct our experiences rather than retrieve copies of them.

Memories should not be regarded as flawed depictions; rather they suggest adaptability: 'If all events were registered in elaborate detail, regardless of the level or type of processing to which they were subjected, [...] the result would be an overwhelming clutter of useless details' (Schacter, 1999, p. 196). It is important to understand the issues raised by inherently unreliable memory not as compromising our insight into another's experiences, but as revealing how individuals choose to construct narrative and identity.

Narrative analysis

I shall first describe what I mean by narrative analysis before discussing how I would use narrative analysis to interpret my interviews with Iraqi women. To quote Steans (2013, p. 140):

Narrative is the means by which we make sense of our everyday lives, the events we observe or participate in and/or what we experience and how we convey our 'sense making' to others in a coherent manner.

Narrative is considered a subset of discourse analysis, as it is the study of language and structure in order to reveal how meaning has been constructed. Most forms of discourse analysis, such as Foucauldian discourse analysis or critical discourse analysis, tend to involve the analysis of a discourse through time and across both texts and other social practices; they draw upon a wide range of materials and endeavours to trace an entire discourse from origin to terminus (see for example Dijk, 1993 & Wetherell et al., 2001). Such broad approaches would not have been appropriate for this project; the more refined focus of narrative analysis accorded with the goal

of amplifying Iraqi women's voices over the distracting noise of dominant narratives.

There are different approaches to narrative analysis, with the two major schools being paradigmatic and narrative-type, as identified by Donald Polkinghorne. He describes the former as involving the collection of 'stories as data', which are then examined:

to identify particulars as instances of general notions or concepts. The paradigmatic analysis of narrative seeks to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data. Most often this approach requires a database consisting of several stories (rather than a single story). The researcher inspects the different stories to discover which notions appear across them (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 13).

'The paradigmatic analysis', Polkinghorne (1995, p. 12) explains, 'results in descriptions of themes that hold across the stories or in taxonomies of types of stories, characters, or settings'. Narrative-type narrative analysis moves in the opposite direction: instead of recognising common elements from stories in the manner of paradigmatic-type narrative analysis, narrative-type narrative analysis constructs stories from common elements (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12). The former was clearly more applicable to this project, enabling the analysis of the stories collected in the interviews to identify common themes and differences. Polkinghorne (1995, p. 13) makes an important clarification about this approach:

Two types of paradigmatic search are possible: (a) one in which the concepts are derived from previous theory or logical possibilities and are applied to the data to determine whether instances of these concepts are to be found; and (b) one in which concepts are inductively derived from the data.

The first type (a) tallied with my project's use of the predetermined framework of intersectionality in order to explore how Iraqi women narrated their identities. Moreover, this type also helped to identify the degree to which Iraqi women's narratives converged with or diverged from the hegemonic representations identified in the literature review, that is, (1) the 'saving' of Muslim women by the US; (2) the veil as a symbol of the oppression of Muslim women; and (3) the homogenization of Middle Eastern and South Asian identities into the discursive figure of 'the Muslim woman'. In addition, the project also drew on Feminist Security Studies in order to identify other themes, such as, women's experiences of conflict, exile and migration, and concepts of security. The second type (b) was useful in highlighting new themes and theories that have been overlooked by scholars.

Narrative analysis was thus an appropriate method for understanding Iraqi women's experiences, in line with a postcolonial feminist epistemological approach that sought to include marginalized women's voices. A narrative approach allows us to capture 'what might otherwise be considered incommensurable differences' (Wibben, 2011, p. 145); that is, on the one hand, personal perspectives of an event and, on the other hand, to offer crucial insights into events because we are able to 'identify the whole to which they belong' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 18). An approach on these premises enabled me to pay attention to difference and avoid universalizing and/or homogenizing Iraqi women's experiences and identities, whilst also allowing these particular experiences to illustrate wider dynamics of power relations.

The study of narratives is thus necessary for understanding the complexities of women's experiences. For example, Wibben (2011, p. 2) discusses Mattingly and colleagues' study of 9/11 narratives and quotes a story of one African-American mother who revealed that 9/11 did not bother her, as she was too busy caring for her handicapped mother in day-to-day life. In telling this story, Wibben (2011, p. 2) makes a larger point about the importance of paying attention to day-to-day narratives:

Staying attuned to varied everyday experience, through the telling of women's stories in this case, is central to feminists' resistance to abstraction. It provides a corrective to the generalizing and universalizing tendencies in traditional science that work to institute bias and obscure responsibility. Insisting on specificity also reveals how there is always more than one point of view and more than one story to be told. The choice to privilege one perspective over another is never innocent or obvious but always intensely political. What is more, the insistence on a singular narrative is itself a form of violence.

More personal narratives can help provide access to alternative voices and offer alternative understandings of canonical events compared to dominant narratives. I plan to build on Wibben's work on the importance of a narrative approach to examining the relationship between women's agency and security.

One of the ways in which my project will use narrative analysis to interpret interviews is by understanding women's experiences:

The intersection of gender with class, nationality and race and other markers of identity have come to inform conceptualization of women's experience and subjectivity. Staying attuned to varied everyday experience, through the telling of women's stories in this

case is central to feminists' resistance to abstraction (Wibben, 2011, p. 15).

My project further guards against homogenization by considering intersectionality as an approach which helps us pay attention to the particularities of differences in social grouping, as:

there is no such thing as suffering from oppression 'as Black', 'as a woman', 'as a working-class person' [...] Any attempt to essentialize 'Blackness' or 'womanhood' or 'working classness' as specific forms of concrete oppression in additive ways inevitably conflates narratives of identity politics with descriptions of positionality as well as constructing identities within the terms of specific political projects (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 195).

We must therefore recognize 'different kind of differences':

By incorporating these different kinds of differences into our analysis we can avoid conflating positionings, identities and values. We can also avoid attributing fixed identity groupings to the dynamic processes of positionality (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 200).

One way my project will operationalize intersectionality is by studying women's identity in relation to security and will pay attention to context, as 'What they considered as threats and envisioned as promising safety and security depended on *who they were*' (Stern, 2005, p. 5).

Embedded in the concept of intersectionality is the idea of identity—this is necessary to define in order to avoid ambiguous and universal use of the term. Identity is a contested concept (Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 261). However, 'identity is an important and useful concept if it is kept within the boundary of a very clear and specific definition' (Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 262). I shall adopt Yuval Davis's (2011, p. 14) use of the term identity which allows for free play of meaning to surface:

Identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not) [...] Not all of these stories are about belonging to particular groupings and collectivities – they can be, for instance, about individual attributes, body images, vocational aspirations or sexual prowess. However, even these stories will often relate, directly or indirectly, to self and/or others' perceptions of what being a member of such a grouping or collectivity (ethnic, racial, national, cultural, religious) might mean. Identity narratives can be individual or they can be collective, with the latter often acting as a resource for the former. Although they can be reproduced from generation to generation, it is

always in a selective way: they can shift and change, be contested and multiple. These identity narratives can relate to the past, to a myth of origin; they can be aimed to explain the present and probably; above all, they function as a projection of future trajectory.

An example of a work which adopts a narrative approach to identity is Maria Stern's research on Mayan women's narratives. Stern-Pettersson (1997, pp. 125-126) makes the compelling argument about why a narrative approach is needed to enable us to study the links between identities and security:

Security for one person in one context may differ drastically in another context; what security means in the family, for example may differ from what it means in encounters with Ladino society, or in the Guatemalan state in general. Moreover, security for one person may represent insecurity for someone else. Similarly, security depends upon where people are located on intersecting systems of oppression or ruling, such as sexism, classism, or racism.

The advantage of taking a narrative approach is that it not only brings out intersectional identity, it also has the potential to detect unfamiliar narratives:

Mayan women's narratives also exposes [sic] the limitations of understanding and practices of security: Mayan women's in/securities cannot be reduced to a location, level, or category ultimately determined by the logic of state sovereignty. Their narratives disrupt the familiar relationship that provide many of the building blocs for understandings and practice of politics, political community, identification, and conceptions of in/security (Stern 2005, p. 193).

Capturing narratives of women in this way will help the present project recognise more 'invisible' psychological forms of insecurities, such as nostalgia, which often produced anxiety for women who felt apprehensive about their future. However, feeling nostalgic also acts as a source of security for some women, because positive memories can create a sense of comfort. I shall later explore the idea of how women have constructed their past and present as a coping tool to produce feelings of security.

Interpreting interviews

Inductive reasoning

As the project was concerned with understanding Iraqi women's experiences, the stipulation of conceptual approaches to the data collected, rather than prescriptively predetermined approaches, proved beneficial. This avoided imposing assumptions on what Iraqi women would opt to discuss. The project thus adopted an inductive direction, according to Stanley and Wise's (1990, p. 22) precepts:

Deductivism treats experience as 'tests' of previously specified theoretical hypotheses; and so, within its theory precedes both experience and research, and these latter two are in a sense predicated upon theory. Inductivism specifies a model of research in which theory is derived from research experience.

It is important to acknowledge that no study could ever be purely inductive (just as it could never be purely deductive); as Stanley and Wise (1990, p. 22) argue, 'researchers cannot have 'empty heads' in the way that inductivism proposed, nor is it possible that theory is untainted by material experiences in the heads of theoreticians in the way that deductivism proposes'. The project, to an extent, had to rely on a theoretical underpinning—in particular, Feminist epistemologies, as these complement inductive approaches, discussed in detail shortly—to enable the researcher to know how to treat and interpret the material. Nonetheless, an approach that was at least in part inductive and that allowed for theoretical building was important to the project.

The theoretical underpinning's most profound manifestation is in the structure of this thesis, which is designed to discuss specific theories as they emerge as appropriate analytic tools in response to the data, rather than predetermining or imposing them within a rigid methodological framework. Therefore, references are made to any conceptual work that emerged as particularly appropriate at the beginning of the relevant chapter, rather than within this methodology. Again, the project's adherence to feminist epistemologies supports this approach, providing the most applicable range of theories on a case-by-case basis.

Interpretivism

Ontologically, this project operated from an interpretivist stance. Interpretivism is seen as the opposite of positivism; the latter seeks objectivity while the former believes that the world is socially constructed. As Jonathan Grix (2010, p. 84) notes, 'the emphasis in this paradigm is on understanding as opposed to explanation, as interpretivists do not believe in

relying on mere observation for understanding social phenomena'. This thesis takes an interpretivist stance, as it seeks to understand how Iraqi women construct meanings and how perception shapes Iraqi women's experiences; the emphasis is on interrogating 'how' rather than 'why' as there could be no objective truth behind these. The historian Trevor Lummis (1988, p. 75) has argued that such emphasis on perception is vital, because 'even 'hard' contemporary statistical data is only what somebody told somebody and if they have good reason and the opportunity to conceal the truth, the 'facts' will be erroneous'.

Thus, I took an interpretivists approach to analysing the interviews, as awareness of the limits of objectivity and the commitment to understanding knowledge as context-dependent were important principles in interpreting the interviews for this project. Feminist scholars challenge the positivist assumption that 'facts' can be regarded as objective. Sandra Harding (1991, pp. 11–12) for instance, asks why the 'conventional view refuses to recognise knowledge's socially-situated character, and what would happen to conventional understandings of "objectivity, relativism, rationality and reflexivity' [...] [once knowledge is understood to be] socially-situated'. Moreover, she suggests:

The inquirer him/herself [should] be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter [...] We need to avoid the "objectivist" stance that attempts to make the researcher's cultural beliefs and practices invisible while simultaneously skewering the research objects, and practices to the display board. Only in this way can we hope to produce understandings and explanations which are free (or, at least, more free) of distortion from the unexamined beliefs and behavior of social scientists themselves (Harding, 1987, p. 9).

The goal of being self-reflexive demanded an understanding of the differential power between the researcher and the researched. Since I adopt a feminist ethos in line with the project's epistemology, self-reflexivity was key when considering the interviews themselves. As a result, the thesis had to be able to overcome the inherently uneven power relationship between scholars and interviewees, which I sought to achieve by acknowledging the researcher's role instead of masking it.

This thesis recognizes the fact that in examining the representations of Iraqi women by US politicians and themselves, researchers need to become an active part of such representations. By acknowledging one's own positionality as a co-producer of knowledge within the interviews, research objectivity is increased. In doing so, awareness of one's own position helps to correct 'pseudo-objectivity' (Harding, 1987, p. 28).

As a non-Iraqi carrying out research for a British university, I had the potential to distort the self-representations of Iraqi women without being aware of it, in a similar way to Gayatri Spivak's (1988) criticism of Western-based postcolonial scholars who try to speak on behalf of the subaltern. I also had the potential as an Arabic speaker, unintentionally, to encourage the interviewees to assume shared frames of reference. Thus, as an Arabic-speaking citizen of an Arab country and a non-Iraqi in a Western-based university, I held both insider and outsider status. It is worth noting that:

Recent discussions of insider/outsider status have unveiled the complexity inherent in either status and have acknowledged that the boundaries between the two positions are not all that clearly delineated. In the real world of data collection, there is a good bit of slippage and fluidity between these two states (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 405).

Having an insider/outsider status shaped my approach in interpreting the interviews. The constructive aspect of this was that a shared language and understanding of Arab communities meant that the interviewees were better able to express themselves in their own words, without the inhibitions of translation. As I am an Arab from Kuwait, the interviewees were able to speak in their mother tongue, make references to Arab culture, and use Arabic expressions. I understood their dialect, as it was very similar to that of Kuwait, and there were some overlaps between Kuwaiti and Iraqi culture. Thus, I was able to interpret their cultural references, and this opened up a set of knowledge that may not otherwise have been possible. Conversely, as an outsider—a student at a British university—some of the interviewees believed that I was able to offer help with their migratory plans and that may have influenced their responses to some degree. I sought, however, to make it clear that I was not in a position to offer such assistance and was transparent about my reasons for conducting interviews. This awareness of the power relations between the researcher and researched helped me approach such complex situations with caution rather than pretending these influences did not exist, facilitating a richer and more honest analysis. As Lizzi Milligan (2016, p. 242) notes: 'Relationships of power between researchers and participants influence the way in which knowledge is constructed and what becomes 'known''. Thus, a feminist approach enabled the project to identify the power relations not just between the US and Iraqi women but also between the researcher and the researched.

Thus, having an outsider/insider positionality in this situation proved to be a strength, as it enabled me to detect slippages in meaning by being exposed to multiple contexts. The interviews were conducted in Arabic before being translated for this thesis, which therefore necessitated reflection on the 'language barrier' between English and Arabic. The problems this posed are

identified by George Steiner (1975) who examined issues with translation and its relation to culture. Translation is not simply the act of turning words in one language into a direct equivalent in another; it is also about transferring ideas from different cultures. Indeed, terms and phrases in one language did not always have direct equivalents in the other language. For example, one interviewee used an Arabic phrase to describe a situation 'as a film'. This is an Arabic expression to mean almost unbelievable or fictitious. It proved helpful therefore to bear in mind Helmuth Berking's (2003, p. 255) work on globalization to encompass an understanding of how global ideas have a local context:

The global circulation of cultural artefacts is leading to a permanent de- and recontextualization of spatially bound cultural knowledge, lifestyles, etc. This means that while integrated in global circulation, they are at the same time permanently (re)defined by an incorporation of images and scripts from [local context].

For instance, some global terms with an apparently fixed definition, such as 'democracy' or 'women's rights', may in fact vary according to local contexts. Drawing upon anthropological and sociological insights into cultural understanding of semantic differences helped to surmount such linguistic and cultural barriers. Even if these insights could not fully resolve the semantic barriers, Berking's argument about globalization and local context provided an explanation for the complexities borne of translation. This suggested the importance of a relativist stance:

In the anthropological sense, then, relativism suggests that in order to understand the meaning that humans give to certain practices, here [women's] rights, we must better understand the contexts through which they attribute meaning and give significance to such practices (Osanloo, 2009, p. 2).

Being mindful of these precepts enabled more effective translation of the interviews; it facilitated reflexivity and made it possible to work around them. Reflecting on these problems also obliged the researcher to better 'listen' to Iraqi women's narratives and to actively avoid making assumptions about social meanings. This was especially necessary, because it also reflected the recognition that self-representations are not independent of dominant narratives. One's ideas of what constitutes gender or class are confined and rooted in already established and recognised socially constructed norms. This meant that it was essential to identify the dominant narratives in which an Iraqi woman's narrative was embedded. In this respect, the national or regional context (of Iraq and of the Arab world) may prove more significant than the global context (of the 'War on Terror'), or the global context may be mediated via the national/regional context. In this

respect, the identification of the relevant context was a necessary step in the interpretation of women's narratives.

Rooting the project in interpretivism highlighted another issue I had to be mindful of when interpreting interviews: understanding the limits of Iraqi women's self-representation. Stuart Hall (1997, p. 15) defines representation as 'the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture'. Thus, representation is the construction of meaning through social interaction, primarily via language. This was of fundamental importance because, in the drive to recognize non-hegemonic alternatives to how impoverished or marginalized women were presented in dominant narratives, there was a risk of falsely assuming there was a definitive, 'real' representation. It was imperative to guard against this, as one's own preconceptions are liable to distort narratives and colour understanding, as well as preclude other interpretations.

Another risk that had to be avoided was that of homogenizing Iraqi women's experiences by regarding the interviews as symbolic of a collective response, rather than as responses of individuals differently positioned in relation to structures of power. Thus, intersectionality serves as an important tool. As such, it was necessary to understand that the women being interviewed might each have reflected different self-identities in relation to the category of 'Iraqi women' and adhered to or advocated different representations of what it means to be an Iraqi woman. Thus, the project simultaneously sought to recognise what is specific and unique about each individual Iraqi women's experiences, whilst also holding on to the fact that Iraq as a birthplace, a place of residence and/or the issuer of citizenship and official documents is a key player in shaping the experiences and identities of the women whom I interviewed. Highlighting the specificity and uniqueness of their experiences did not serve as another factor in the 'Othering' of Iraqi women; rather, it took seriously the particularities of their situation in order to illuminate both their representation and larger structural issues in world Politics and Feminist IR.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the methodology for this thesis. In line with the project's postcolonial feminist epistemology to create alternative knowledge about Iraqi women, their experiences and their identities, the research was based on semi-structured interviews with Iraqi women. This thesis will adopt a narrative analysis approach in order to capture women's personal experiences and self-identities. By establishing how the interviewees narrated their own identities, in terms of gender, class and religion, attention was brought to bear on the relationship between identity, subjectivity and experiences, as well as revealing the degree to which Iraqi women narrated identities that resisted, negotiated or complied with their hegemonic

representation. Narrative analysis enables identification of wider themes from the interviews that were separate from hegemonic knowledge informed by Western narratives, thereby presenting alternative knowledge on its own terms in order to foreground the voices of marginalized women.

Chapter Four: Iraqi Women's Narratives of US Foreign Policy Following the 2003 Invasion of Iraq

My main research question asks: *How do Iraqi women's narratives disrupt existing hegemonic knowledge about representations and experiences of Muslim women?* Therefore, Chapter Four provides an analysis of Iraqi women's own narratives in response to US foreign policies and foreign policy narratives. The primary purpose of this is to capture Iraqi women's diverse positionalities, and in doing so, demonstrate how their narratives constitute an alternative knowledge. In line with my feminist standpoint approach, I focus on Iraqi women's own narratives about US foreign policies and demonstrate how these create alternative knowledge about US foreign policy. In particular, women's narratives challenge the notion that there is a clear periodization between the Bush and Obama presidencies in terms of their policies towards Iraq. In conjunction with standpoint theory, I draw on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory in order to demonstrate the complexity and plurality of Iraqi women's narratives in terms of their relationship to hegemonic knowledge. Meanwhile, I deploy the concept of Occidentalism in order to understand agency in relation to hegemonic knowledge.

In order to contextualize the interviewees' narratives, I have provided an overview of US hegemonic narratives of the Bush's and Obama's administrations. I then detail how Stuart Hall's decoding theory—which includes the concept of the hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional positions—enabled the study of women's positionality in relation to US foreign policy narratives with degrees of complexity and nuance. This facilitated my goal of offering a pluralistic account of women's voices. I discuss the concept of Occidentalism as a supplement for decoding theory in order to demonstrate for example, that even a hegemonic position is an agential position thereby challenging binary oppositions such as 'us vs them', 'powerful vs powerless'. This finding will provoke feminist IR scholars to re-evaluate their approach of prioritising hegemonic knowledge to understanding power relations. This also allowed me to address the subsidiary research question: *How do Iraqi women relate to US foreign policy narratives and representations of Iraqi women?*

The key finding of this chapter is: Iraqi women's narratives disrupt hegemonic US narratives and postcolonial feminist critiques of US narratives because of the different ways in which they relate to US narratives. Moreover, the relationship between different positionalities and agency is more complex than the terms hegemonic/oppositional/negotiated suggest.

Chapter overview

This study aims to address the main research question: *How do Iraqi women's narratives disrupt existing hegemonic knowledge about representations and experiences of Muslim women?* In this chapter, I aim to answer the main research question and meet the study's objective of providing a pluralistic account of Iraqi women's positionalities and experiences in relation to US hegemonic knowledge as way of disrupting dominant knowledge about Iraqi women in particular and Muslim women in general. In doing so, I intend to address the gap identified in the literature review—mainly that feminist scholars who have critiqued US foreign policy narratives tend to neglect the vital issue of how these are received by the Muslim women who are their objects. This chapter will demonstrate how a standpoint feminist epistemology of foregrounding marginalized voices will help us understand power relations from women's perspectives and therefore offer a different perspective of the Iraq war narrative.

More specifically, I seek to understand how Iraqi women perceive US foreign policy and foreign policy narratives, including the instrumentalization of Iraqi women within these narratives, and how they position themselves in relation to these. To what degree, if at all, do Iraqi women reject US foreign policy narratives, in line with postcolonial feminist critiques of US foreign policy? Or do Iraqi women acknowledge or even appropriate aspects of US foreign policy narratives? The chapter will thus contribute to the project's overall concern with capturing pluralistic and complex positions of Iraqi women in order to avoid essentializing and homogenizing Iraqi women's experiences.

The chapter will begin by offering an overview of US foreign policy narratives on Iraqi women since 2003. Then, I shall discuss the lack of Iraqi women's sense of periodization of the Bush and Obama administration's policy. I then discuss how a standpoint feminist epistemology facilitated in producing alternative knowledge that is socially situated. And complementing this approach is the theory of encoding/decoding and its application to my interview material, as well as the concept of 'Occidentalism', which is discussed in relation to the theory of encoding/decoding. Following these micro-level theoretical discussions, the chapter provides an analysis of Iraqi women's narratives and their position in relation to US foreign policy narratives.

The Bush and Obama administration's foreign policy narratives of Iraqi women since 2003

Based on the interviews with the Iraqi women, the three key themes that recur in their narratives and the narratives of the Bush and Obama administration are:

1. Attitudes towards US officials and personnel;
2. Attitudes towards the US narrative of 'saving' and 'empowering' Iraqi women;
3. Attitudes towards the US narrative on its role in bringing democracy and development.

I shall now provide an overview of the relevant US foreign policy narratives under each theme in order to reference Iraqi women's engagement with these themes. This will serve to draw a more comparable and consistent analysis between US narratives in relation to Iraqi women's positionalities. This will also help me apply the idea of Occidentalism in order to detect how the interviewees reworked knowledge about themselves in relation to these themes.

US Foreign Policy sources

It is important to note that I have collected the US foreign policy remarks from the US State Department archives. These narratives were comprised of 'remarks', a designated term taken from the US State Department website to include various forms of public address such as speeches, question and answer sessions, interviews and press releases, which are archived on the website. These were all thereby implicitly considered 'official' statements, and it was justified to regard them as espousing US foreign policy narratives.

Theme 1: Attitudes towards US officials and personnel

This theme refers to the image of the Bush and Obama administration that they constructed for themselves. The Iraqi women I interviewed often referred to the personalities of US officials or the administration itself. Their perception of the leadership of each administration and its representatives in Iraq, which many interviewees differentiated between, is best understood by examining the policy approach to Iraq that each administration adopted. I must note that the interviewees occasionally conflated the Bush and Obama administrations; they sometimes ascribed characteristics to the Obama or Bush administrations that confused the two.

The Bush administration's foreign policy approach stemmed from a belief that the US had not only a right but in fact an obligation to intervene on behalf of Iraqi women. This relied on a model of exceptionalism, which Lipset (1996, p. 18) describes as 'qualitatively different' from most countries, denoting the US as an outlier rather than superior. Still, it is a position which is used to justify intervention in lesser nations (Lipset, 1996, pp. 18–19), to embed the idea that America's moral superiority not only justified but made paramount the invasion of Iraq and, more widely, the

US's post-9/11 foreign policy; this was the duty of a greater people to a lesser.

Andrea G. Bottner, Director of the Office of International Women's Issues who served under the Bush administration, evoked Ronald Reagan in advocating a morally superior America that could and should elevate the rest of the world. She cited him in a speech specifically in the context of women in Iraq, in an address entitled 'Courageous Women in Iraq, Afghanistan and Beyond':

He said, 'This, then, is our task. We must present to the world not just an America that's militarily strong, but an America that is morally powerful, an America that has a creed, a cause, a vision of a future time when all peoples have the right to self-government and personal freedom' (Bottner, US State Department, 2008).

Bottner expressed the Bush administration's conviction that to intervene in Iraq on behalf of Iraqi women was to advance U.S. values of 'freedom' and 'self-government', an obligation espoused by Reagan. Bush's 2004 (The White House, 2004) speech entitled 'Information Sharing, Patriot Act Vital to Homeland Security' affirms:

There's nothing they [terrorists] can do to intimidate, to make us change our deepest beliefs. They're trying to kill to shake our will; we're too tough, too strong, too resolute, and too determined to have our will shaken by thugs and terrorists.

The reiteration of 'too' and the litany of masculine qualities ('tough', 'strong' and 'resolute') assert American strength. The US expressed their 'hypermasculinity' (Nandy, 1983) by presenting Iraqi women as part of an inferior geographical region and by offering protection which can be regarded as having a paternalistic quality. Bottner's depiction of the US as a moral power intervening to rescue victimized Iraqi women thus interweaved with and advanced a broader narrative of the universality and masculine force of America in a post-9/11 world. The continual assertion of Iraqi women as victims allows the US to construct itself as paternalistic. This echoes Youngs' (2003, p. 2) assertion:

The gendered logic of the masculine role of protector in relation to women and children illuminates the meaning and effective appeal of a security state that wages war abroad and expects obedience and loyalty at home. [...] The logic of masculinist protection justifies aggressive war outside.

In contrast, the Obama administration diverts from the Bush administration's habit of inferring US superiority from the narrative of the

saving of Iraqi women. The Obama administration instead adopt an ‘internationalist’ approach. For example, then Secretary of State John Kerry (US State Department, 2014) expressed interest in building a coalition: ‘And that’s precisely why we are building a coalition to try to stop them from denying the women and the girls and the people of Iraq the very future that they yearn for’. Kerry has also frequently invoked international law and human values to justify the need to intervene against Daesh. Kerry (US State Department, 2014) made clear the commitment of the Obama administration’s policy of adopting an internationalist narrative of human rights:

I want to emphasize this coalition is not just a military campaign. It is a multinational effort, increasingly, as I said, marshaled by the Arab community, to promote stability and peace throughout the region for the benefit of everyone in the region. And although the center of our activities is Iraq – and Syria, to some degree – ISIL’s influence is by no means confined to one part of the world.

I shall explore whether the interviewees embrace the idea of autonomy as initially implied by the Obama administration, or endorse Bush’s more paternalistic approach, in order to capture the diverse views of Iraqi women.

Theme 2: Attitudes towards the US narrative of ‘saving’ and ‘empowering’ Iraqi women

A central theme in US narratives in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, as discussed in the literature review, was to ‘save’ Iraqi women from the brutal dictatorship of Saddam Hussein as well as to ‘empower’ them in building the ‘new Iraq’. As feminist scholars have noted, discourses of ‘saving’ Other women are often based on assumptions that they are oppressed by their ‘culture’. I have demonstrated in the literature review that the Bush administration presented Iraqi women as victims in order to justify ‘saving’ them. There is often an assumption in the literature that Iraqi women did not want to be ‘saved’; the possibility that they might indeed see themselves as victims in need of saving is ignored. The interviewees suggest that this is not necessarily the case, presenting a more complex relationship with the theme of saving. Accepting the idea of saving does not necessarily signal victimization but can highlight agency.

The narrative that Iraqi women need saving from Saddam Hussein is encapsulated by Charlotte Ponticelli, Senior Coordinator for International Women’s Issues, in her October 2004 speech entitled ‘Women in War and Reconstruction: The US Commitment to Women in Afghanistan and Iraq’. In this speech, she declared that:

These individual examples are mirrored in the thousands of other Iraqi women whose rightful roles in their society we are helping to restore. Indeed, Iraqi women were once among the best educated and most professionally accomplished in the region. That is why it was shocking to hear from UN experts that, by the end of Saddam's rule, more than two-thirds of all Iraqi women were actually illiterate, and each year at least 400 of them were murdered in so-called "honor killings" he had legalized. Many thousands more were slaughtered by Saddam's own militias, and left to rot in mass graves. As one Iraqi woman who survived this reign of terror told us, 'You can stop searching for weapons of mass destruction; you have already found them. They were the regime' (Ponticelli, US State Department, 2004).

Ponticelli highlights women's situation in Iraq in order to emphasize the corrupt, destructive nature of Saddam Hussein's regime, figured as the factor in Iraqi women's victimization. In addition to 'saving women' from Saddam Hussein, Yasmin Al-Jawahri (2008 p. 77) argued that this statement operates to erase the impact of many years of international sanctions, which impoverished Iraqis and led many to drop out of school.

The Bush administration made the saving narrative about liberating women from the oppression of Saddam Hussein's regime rather than religion. Bush (September 2002, the White House) focused on seeming tolerant towards Islam:

The people of Iraq can shake off their captivity [...] These nations can show by their example that honest government and respect for women and the great Islamic tradition of learning can triumph in the Middle East and beyond.

Moreover, the Bush administration also constructed the image of Iraqi women as empowered after being liberated from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein. The majority of the literature on the Bush administration's representation of Iraqi women iterates a reading of a narrative of victims in need of rescue. A number of scholars detect a simultaneous and more ambiguous narrative at work, which also attributes a degree of agency to Iraqi women and enables us to understand the Bush administration's conception of women's rights in another way. Al-Ali and Pratt (2009, p. 80) argue that Iraqi women were presented as agents of change, not just as victims, and Katherine Allison (2013) argues that US foreign policy discourse more broadly represented Muslim women as 'agential'. The subsequent section 'Theme 3: attitudes towards the US narrative on its role in bringing democracy and development' will discuss in detail how Iraqi women were constructed as collaborators and as empowered.

There is a noticeable difference between the Bush and Obama administrations' narrative of saving. The Obama's administration harnessed Iraqi women's rights to justify US military intervention to combat Daesh through a narrative of 'saving' victimized women. Iraqi women are presented as victims of Daesh's sexual violence, rather than of undemocratic tyranny, which was the notion the Bush administration associated with Saddam Hussein. It is important to note that there was sexual violence and other violence against Iraqi women when the Bush administration was involved in Iraq in 2003. A Human Rights Report published in 2003 (as cited in Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009, p. 157) noted:

While men constitute the majority of victims of violence, the lack of security affects women in particular ways. Violence against women has increased since the immediate post-invasion chaos, when an alarming number of cases of sexual violence and abductions of women and girls were identified in Baghdad alone.

However, the Bush administration did not focus on discussing these violences as it would have tarnished the invasion that was supposed to be a 'liberation'. By contrast, the Obama administration is able to refer to sexual violence against women because it boosts the case for their military involvement. The Obama administration posited victimization based on sexual violence in order to establish the urgent nature of the security issue in Iraq. In response to the feminist group Code Pink protesting against the military campaign, John Kerry (US State Department, 2014) explicitly invoked this narrative and claimed that US military intervention was crucial for the safety of Iraqi women from such barbarous men:

You ought to care about fighting ISIL, because ISIL is killing and raping and mutilating women, and they believe women shouldn't have an education. They sell off girls to be sex slaves to jihadists. There is no negotiation with ISIL; there is nothing to negotiate. And they're not offering anyone health care of any kind. They're not offering education of any kind, for a whole philosophy or idea or cult, whatever you want to call it, that frankly comes out of the Stone Age. They're cold-blooded killers marauding across the Middle East making a mockery of a peaceful religion.

Perhaps as pertinent was the need to represent Daesh as a barbaric and chaotic organization, rather than a legitimate entity. Where Saddam Hussein, a long-serving president with all the apparatus of government, was portrayed as a ruling tyrant, Daesh is portrayed as brutish and illegitimate. Obama (The White House, 2014) himself said 'ISIL is not Islamic [...] and [is] certainly not a state'. As such, the narrative of saving Iraqi women constructed by the Bush administration resurfaced in the later stages of the

Obama administration, but in an adjusted form reflecting the different foe the US faced.

Through the representation of Daesh as generally barbaric and irrational, sexual violence is deployed to emphasise this barbarism and irrationality. Obama (The White House, 2014) referred to Daesh as perpetrators of multifarious evil deeds: 'They execute captured prisoners. They kill children. They enslave, rape, and force women into marriage'. The faceless, unidentified 'they' hints at a gendered and familiar evil; the assumption is of a male, monstrous category, implicitly drawing on the historical orientalist figure of the 'brown men' perpetrating barbaric and uncivilized practices against 'brown women' (Spivak 1988, p. 297). Malinowski (US State Department, 2015) reiterated this in a speech entitled 'ISIL's Abuses Against Women and Girls in Iraq and Syria':

I emphasize this to say that the defeat of Daesh and the defense of human rights, especially the rights of women, go hand-in-hand. We will restore human rights by defeating Daesh, but the reverse is also true: we will defeat Daesh in part by defending the rights of its intended victims.

In positing this, Malinowski conjures the sense of Muslim men persecuting Iraqi women. Indeed, the Obama administration notably departed from the Bush administration's determination that the US should be 'saving' Iraqi women on non-religious grounds. Saddam Hussein's tyranny was replaced by the extremism of Daesh; correspondingly, the Obama administration frequently emphasized that Iraqi women were being victimized by a perverted form of Islam.

The Obama administration demonstrated that the situation with Daesh had deteriorated by premising it on a representation of Iraqi women's status and wellbeing that is measured in terms of the veil, a trope avoided by the Bush administration for its Islamic connotations. The US State Department (Senior State Department Officials, 2014) archive records unnamed officials at a briefing in Jordan remarking that:

If you go back and read stories from when [inaudible] fell, and it says, 'Oh, they're treating everyone well and the women can show their hair,' and everything, fast-forward to now, and there's a public crucifixion in the town square. That's just what ISIL does.

Theme 3: Attitudes towards the US narrative on its role in bringing democracy and development

The Bush administration constructed itself as culturally superior, and this was manifested in US discourses relating to bringing 'democracy' and

‘development’ to Iraq. Therefore, Iraq implicitly was regarded as inferior because democracy and development is absent in Iraqi society. The Bush administration also constructed a narrative about Iraqi women as necessarily supportive of the invasion and natural allies of the US in the building of a ‘new Iraq’. Alternatively, the Obama administration constructed the narrative of Iraqi women as autonomous, to signal that they had been liberated and that the US was ready to withdraw its troops from Iraq. However, with the emergence of Daesh, the saving narrative was resurrected by the Obama administration in order to combat the threat of Daesh. The interviewees complicate this narrative; however, democracy was generally recognized as a laudable goal but not in the fashion envisaged by the US. Most Iraqi women appear to harbour a distinct conception of democracy, suggesting that its values are not as universal as assumed by US politicians.

The Bush administration’s narratives on democracy were premised on the idea of delivering progress as manifested in the Freedom Agenda. This progress was most commonly associated with and defined by Western notions of women’s rights and democratic participation. Iraqi women were thus used to symbolise the democratic and moral values being instilled in Iraq, as rescued victims turned democracy-makers through US patronage. The Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (US State Department, 2005) claimed that:

[We] send a clear message to the women of the world who are not yet free: As you stand for your rights and for your liberty, America stands with you. (Applause.) The United States believes that no country can succeed without the contribution of its entire population. In recent months, we supported the women of Afghanistan, Iraq and of the future Palestine as they heroically went to the polls.

Iraqi women are conflated with women across a ‘broader Middle East’; this not only maintained the important process of Othering but also represented these women as symbolic markers of the potential for similar ideological improvements to be made throughout the region. Guney and Gokcan (2010) suggest that the war in Iraq was used as an exemplary model of democracy in the newly expanded Middle East, in order to seduce the rest of the region to follow suit.

Another example of the US homogenizing Muslim and Middle Eastern women is the speech given by Paula Dobriansky (US State Department, 2005), Under Secretary for Global Affairs, who declared on International Women’s Day in 2005:

First Lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice hosted at the State Department this morning an extremely vibrant

and incredibly accomplished group of women from 15 Muslim countries. These women came together at our invitation for an open and frank discussion on the challenges and opportunities that women face in strengthening democracy in their countries and also how the United States can help.

The conflation of 15 separate but unidentified nations, summed up as ‘Muslim’ without regard to variation in political systems, influence of other religions or secularism, or particular histories or contexts, seems staggering in this context.

The US sought to implement democracy by making a regional generalization about literacy issues. Andrea G. Bottner (US State Department, 2008), Director of the Office of International Women’s Issues, remarks:

In the broader Middle East, of the estimated 70 million people who are illiterate, two-thirds of them are female. This administration is dramatically expanding our English-language programs to address this issue.

Bottner’s assumptions about women in the ‘broader’ Middle East presumably included Afghanistan and other non-Middle-Eastern but predominantly Muslim countries. Part of the US narrative of democracy and development was realized by bringing programs that were American in style to the region. This includes the notion that the only viable solution to female illiteracy is US-provided English language programmes. This presents the US as the ‘saviour’ of a homogenized Middle Eastern woman cohort, and assumes that literacy must be premised on fluency in English rather than Arabic or other local languages.

In eliding this progress, Bottner uses women’s illiteracy as a marker of the general ‘backwardness’ of the region. American intervention in Iraq was thus premised in large part on a narrative of ‘saving’ Iraqi women from oppression and limited opportunities; in order to associate this inextricably with the narrative of the ‘War on Terror’, the Bush administration posited it as a rescue mission against a tyrant—Saddam Hussein—which would therefore curtail this endemic ‘backwardness’. That these women were understood to be eager for American rescue, however, was also the strongest argument for intervention.

The narrative that, following their liberation from Saddam Hussein’s rule, Iraqi women were rising heroically to new democratic opportunities was made clear two years later in a panel discussion chaired by Dobriansky. This panel was boldly named ‘Founding Mothers: Next Steps in Post-Election Afghanistan and Iraq’, punning on the US’s vaunted Founding Fathers to

situate the agency and heroism of Iraqi women within a US framework. Introduced by Dobriansky, Iraq's new Minister of Women's Affairs Narmin Othman (US State Department, 2005) validated the Bush administration's narrative:

Iraq's present and future is rich with possibilities and potential and we need to ensure democracy and freedom are secure; therefore, we need help from all the world to help Iraq, and from our friends we need help to reach our mission, to reach a new world, which Iraqi people always dreamed about. We dreamed that we have a democracy, we can speak, we can write in a newspaper what we will, what we want. Never could we say (anything) against the previous regime. Never could we say that he used a wrong policy. Never could we use, why you are killed me? Why you put me in a prison? For he have rights and he had rights for everything [sic].

It is worth noting that the Iraqi women the US invited to speak endorsed the narratives of the US. The likelihood is that only approved collaborators were granted this platform. Othman (US State Department, 2005) went on provide an example of an Iraqi woman literally giving birth to democracy, 'A pregnant woman had a baby at the polling place and she get the name for her daughter, Al Intekhabat, it means election [sic]'. Further, Tanya Gilly (in Dobriansky, US State Department, 2003), an Iraqi-Kurdish woman, appeared at a Bush administration event and noted:

It's our duty here as women who have been able to have the privilege of learning about through [sic] democracy that has existed in Europe and the United States to take some of that back and to show our women that they could do more because Iraqi women are fairly educated.

Gilly represents Iraqi women as similar to, but lacking the opportunities of, American women. She implies that she, and other Iraqi women who have had the 'privilege' of learning from the West, have in effect been rescued and can now act as heroines, using their privileges to rescue other Iraqi women in turn. She is thus the exact model of an Iraqi woman the Bush administration sought to represent, and is therefore permitted the expression and opportunity to exercise her own agency. The ambivalence underlying this—of a victimized Iraqi woman enabled to speak in the terms of the US—is noteworthy for the simultaneity of the victimization and collaborator tropes.

The Obama administration was eager to withdraw from Iraq and end the occupation; Iraqi women almost entirely disappeared from official foreign policy narratives, only occasionally being mentioned as having attained autonomy in order to justify the US withdrawal. Thus, the Obama

administration foreign policy narrative underwent considerable adjustment from the Bush administration's foreign policy narrative, perhaps most of all in the abrupt U-turn in the representation of Iraqi women. The narrative of saving, so prevalent under the Bush administration, disappeared, and with them passed the obligation for America's presence in Iraq.

The Obama administration infrequently invoked the idea that Iraqi women were empowered by the 'birth' of democracy and other development opportunities in Iraq, in order to suggest their autonomy and independence from the US's support. Hillary Clinton (US State Department 2009) made a rare comment on Iraqi women when she insisted that 'women have committed to supporting this new democracy'. Her assertion came as a response in a Q&A, when she was asked a direct question as to what the US was doing to 'advance' or 'empower' Iraqi women (Clinton, US State Department, 2009). Clinton's response is highly suggestive; she did not nominate any form of US engagement with or support for Iraqi women, instead reframing the issue as one in which Iraqi women had made a commitment to democracy, thereby suggesting that the US had already saved and trained Iraqi women. They are simply autonomous Iraqi citizens.

The contrast with the Bush administration's reiterated representation of close, collaborative links with Iraqi women through specific training programmes is illustrative; Clinton adopts and adapts the old theme of empowerment to justify the Obama administration's change of direction. The representation of Iraqi women as autonomous allies was echoed in a 2010 panel to mark the visit of Iraqi women council leaders to the US (the kind of trip that the Bush administration frequently used to promote the imparting of US democratic skills to Iraqi women). Clinton refrained from highlighting or celebrating the panellists' gender or their contribution to Iraqi democracy. She described the visit as being 'to participate in an exchange of ideas on public service in the US and in Iraq' (Clinton, US State Department, 2010), considering the countries as sharing ideas on an equal footing, rather than expressing the power relationship of the Bush administration which advocated one nation rescuing and building another nation through a female franchise. The narrative of autonomy and independence seemed to crystallise in the Obama administration's representation of Iraqi women.

With the emergence of Daesh, however, the Obama administration's narrative on autonomy was altered. Malinowski (US State Department, 2014a) described how: 'We could only calm down after hearing US jets above us. We felt, 'There is still someone there to save us'.' The US's relationship with Iraqi women is figured here as that of a protector in the skies rather than a collaborator on the ground; it was defined in military not nation-building terms, and consequently Iraqi women were represented only

in terms of passive victims in need of immediate, military rescue, not as nascent champions of democracy.

Iraqi Women narratives about the aftermath of the 2003 US led invasion of Iraq

The following section will discuss the theories which will facilitate in highlighting women's situated knowledge advocated by standpoint feminist epistemology.

Encoding/Decoding Theory

To reflect on the wide range of positions maintained by different women on different topics, these are each discussed under sections based on Hall's concept of positionality in relation to dominant narratives as being hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional. This allows women's narratives to be studied systematically according to position. Under each position, I consider the interviewees' attitudes towards US foreign policy and US foreign policy narratives under three main themes: 1) attitudes towards US officials and personnel; 2) attitudes towards the US narrative on its role in bringing democracy and development; and 3) attitudes towards the US narrative of 'saving' and 'empowering' Iraqi women.

I shall highlight the importance for considering Hall's encoding/decoding theory, in order to understand the positions of Iraqi women in relation to US foreign policy narratives and to complicate the idea of what constitutes as agential when considering an individual's positionality. I will also identify possible shortcomings and seek to address these by modifying or extending the theory in this study.

Stuart Hall (1973) originally developed the encoding/decoding model of communication to study the transmission of media messages. Hall problematizes the traditional model of communication for its linearity, in which the sender sends the message and the receiver accepts the message. Such a model understands receivers as passive. Instead, Hall believes that receivers are not disempowered, but rather play an active role in shaping messages.

According to Hall's communication model, encoding explains the process in which texts are produced and disseminated while decoding denotes the ways in which the receiver interprets these messages. His theory will be adapted for this study; the encoding part will comprise the questions posed to Iraqi women. These questions are linked to the narratives and themes emerging out of US foreign policy narratives regarding its mission in Iraq, as articulated in the literature and in remarks retrieved from US State Department archives. The decoding part will consider how Iraqi women choose to interpret these themes and questions.

Hall (1973, p. 125) makes the important point that individuals do not necessarily receive hegemonic narratives in the way intended by those who create such narratives: ‘decodings do not follow inevitably from encodings’. This is a fundamental point that is neglected in much of the literature, in which the hegemonic narratives of the US are allowed to hold undue sway. In analysing the narratives of the interviewees, I deploy the three positions as developed by Stuart Hall: the hegemonic, that is, wholly agreeing with US narratives; the negotiated, that is, only in part agreeing with US narratives; and the oppositional, that is, completely disagreeing with US narratives. The negotiated position is particularly under-researched in the literature. To begin understanding the significance of studying this position, one must consider Homi Bhabha’s argument that identities are not stable. Bhabha (1994, pp. 1–2) illustrates this point by noting that when two cultures meet and interact, interstices arise:

‘in-between’ spaces [that] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

Therefore, the negotiated position allows for the marking of fluctuated presence in one’s identity and experience, enabling new meanings to surface.

Despite the importance of Hall’s encoding/decoding model for producing pluralistic meanings, his communication model is not without limitations. A key limitation in Hall’s theory is the rigidity of the three decoding positions. To rectify this, each of these positions will be treated as an umbrella term, with degrees of variance within them, as my project takes the view that agreeability, or a lack of it, is a spectrum. In doing so, I will be able to bring out the ‘multiform, fissured, schizophrenic, unevenly developed, culturally, discursively and politically discontinuous, forming part of a shifting realm of ramifying differences and contradictions’ (Stam, 2000, p. 233) These positionalities should therefore be understood as schematic; my analysis will provide justification for classifying narratives in a particular way, but this should not preclude a fluidity of readings. The pluralist possibilities of decoding are integral to my project.

Adopting Hall’s terms opens up the interpretability of US foreign policy narratives and confers control of the meaning of the message to Iraqi women. One of the main purposes of this chapter is to highlight Iraqi women’s agency through a study of their decoding positions. Taking a position and interpreting a message are not passive roles. Revealing the positionalities of Iraqi women recognizes that Iraqi women have the power

to destabilize or reclaims meanings, thereby subverting hegemonic knowledge production.

This broadens the concept of agency beyond its understanding in some of the literature, which amplifies women who oppose hegemonic knowledge and assumes that this form of agency is most valid. This leads to a reductive binary, pitting Iraqi women against the US; scholars including Lila Abu-Lughod (2002), Nadia Al-Sajji (2009) and Maryam Khaled (2011) highlight Muslim women who oppose US narratives but disregard women who look to the US positively. Instead, this project foregrounds women's pluralistic decoding positions as a way of highlighting the wide-ranging ways that agency may be expressed. In this way, I build on the work of the late Saba Mahmoud (2005), who believes in broadening and complicating rather than restricting the concept of agency.

Through tracing Iraqi women's decoding positions, I can better understand Iraqi women's complex attitudes towards the US. By allowing for a range of positions associated with an individual woman, I aim to reflect individual perspectives while still identifying possible broader trends of hegemonic, negotiated or oppositional positions within which such individual perspectives may be situated. An individual woman can also adopt different positions in relation to different themes or components of a narrative; indeed, many women who validate one element of US narratives may oppose another. This could be indicative of the ambivalent position towards the US as encapsulated by the logics of Occidentalism.

Occidentalism

The concept of Occidentalism is necessary to engage with in order to make sense of why we need to take seriously Iraqi women's decoding positions as agential and why it could complicate the way we think about power relations. This section will discuss key interpretations of Occidentalism and will offer the most appropriate definition, which enhances and deepens our understanding of Iraqi women's decoding positionalities and can better highlight their alternative knowledge.

Why is Occidentalism significant for understanding women's positionality, and what kind of Occidentalism offers the best mechanism to do so? Little attention has been given to the study of Occidentalism in Feminist IR. This is partly due to their adherence to Edward Said's Orientalism. Although Said presented a compelling case about how Western hegemonic discursive power controlled and authenticated knowledge over the Orient, he overlooked the Orient's power in shaping knowledge about themselves and the West. This had the consequence of rendering their agency invisible. Occidentalism was not a central concern in his work because Said thought of the study of Occidentalism in simplistic terms. Notably, he exemplified

this by arguing ‘no one is likely to imagine a field symmetrical to Orientalism called Occidentalism’ (Said, 1978, p. 50). While I agree with Said’s point that the Orientalism is not symmetrical to Occidentalism, the nature of power relations is best understood as a complex process. My project therefore seeks to demonstrate that their pluralistic positionalities dismantle binary oppositions.

Said was faced with criticism by a number of scholars, such as Mehrzad Boroujerdi (1996, 2006) and Tavakoli-Targhi (2001), who disagreed with his thesis on Occidentalism and sought to study Occidentalism as Orientalism in reverse. These scholars’ understanding of Occidentalism as symmetrical to Orientalism is problematic, because it assumes even distribution of power in knowledge between the West and East—such an understanding is counter-productive. As Neil Lazarus (2002, p. 54) has argued, ‘one cannot hope to displace or overturn Eurocentric reason by inversion, not least since such a strategy merely replicates, rather than challenges, the thoroughgoing essentialism of the dominant optic.’

Some scholars, such as Fernando Coronil (1996, p. 56), sought to study Occidentalism with more complexity and have thus not regarded it to serve as the flipside of Orientalism but as its mirror image:

I am primarily interested in the concerns and images of the Occident that underwrite their representations of non-Western societies, whether in the Orient or elsewhere. This perspective does not involve a reversal of focus from Orient to Occident, from Other to Self. Rather, by guiding our understanding toward the relational nature of representations of human collectivities, it brings out into the open their genesis in asymmetrical relations of power, including the power to obscure their genesis in inequality, to sever their historical connections, and thus to present as the internal and separate attributes of bounded entities what are in fact historical outcomes of connected peoples. Occidentalism, as I define it here, is thus not the reverse of Orientalism but its condition of possibility, its darkside (as in a mirror).

This approach recognises that, for instance, US hegemonic knowledge holds more sway in altering images of Others, but it also recognises that such power is limited. Thus, it opens up the idea of alternative knowledges that have the mechanism to challenge hegemonic knowledge. As a consequence, this definition should underpin the way in which we treat Iraqi women’s positions as a vehicle for change. Moreover, I shall also explore the concept of Occidentalism in part because, as a ‘double reflection’ according to Meltem Ahiska (2010, p. 51), it involves how the self can be posited: ‘I am what I think how the others (who are symbolically significant informed by the hegemonic discourse of signifiers or the ‘master-signifier’) see me’. This

concept is important in order to establish how Iraqi women's positionalities produce, reproduce, alter, negotiate and contest US narratives, and, in turn their own identities.

Positionality

The following sections discuss how hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional positions in relation to the US and US narratives were articulated in the narratives of the interviewees. These articulations are explored through different themes as identified by the interviewees. Each of these sections will reveal the degree to which the interviewees endorsed or rejected US narratives. These sections seek to demonstrate that Iraqi women's narratives revise and reclaim Western assumptions, which in turn create new space for knowledge. These varying positions are reflective of the fluidity of the narratives of Iraqi women in relation to the changing policies of the US, exploring contradictory views, negotiated and indifferent positions.

Hegemonic

The term 'hegemony' is deployed in this thesis to denote instances where knowledge is presented as objective and serves the interest of the powerful. The hegemonic position, which some Iraqi women have adopted, challenges the orientalist binary opposition of modernity vs backwardness or civilized vs uncivilized by complicating ideas towards the Occident and by reimagining themselves. Therefore, it is important to note that those Iraqi women who adopt what Hall labels a hegemonic position in relation to US narratives are not dupes of Western knowledge or lacking in agency. These women navigate a complex relationship that reflects their desire to maximise their autonomy in relation to the environment in which they find themselves and in relation to their own identities and experiences.

Attitudes towards US officials and personnel

Several women believed that US politicians supported Iraqi women's agency, a recognition of 'the collaborator' and 'heroine' tropes endorsed by the Bush administration. However, this trope is actually challenged by many feminist scholars. Most feminist scholars writing about the subject have only detected themes of victimization (for example, Abu-Lughod 2001; Alia Al Sajji, 2009).

The interviewees expressed a hegemonic position towards US officials and personnel to the degree to which they expressed positive attitudes and believed that Americans respected Iraqi women. This would seem to endorse the US narrative that Iraqi women were supportive of the invasion and natural allies of the US.

Take the example of Shayma, who is a 50-year-old Sunni. Iraq remains her place of residence, and she is a feminist activist. Shayma met some US individuals, more specifically Human Rights lawyers, to discuss the writing of the constitution and the mechanisms of Iraqi democracy. She kept in touch with US officials who were stationed in her town long after the invasion came to an end. Her experience dealing with America colleagues shaped Shayma's position positively:

US politicians regard the Iraqi woman as accomplished, highly educated, with a strong personality. Iraqi women are viewed with high esteem. If you offer her freedom and implement laws that protect women, the Iraqi woman would thrive.

Shayma adds:

I've met US officials and they do treat Iraqi women differently from other women. They treat us with respect and consideration. There are women in Iraq who are modernised, educated and have awareness and are well read. We have people like Zaha Hadid.¹

Shayma does not suggest that Americans are universally courteous and respectful towards women. Rather, she believes that Iraqi women in particular have earned the right to respect from Americans because of a shared affinity to modernity. She draws on Iraqi national narratives about Iraq's modernity, of which Iraqi women are a marker (for example, Al-Ali, 2007), to endorse US narratives about Iraqi women, thereby reaffirming her self-identity as a modern Iraqi woman. This is not unique to Shayma—the notion that US politicians responded positively to Iraqi women was also expressed by other interviewees.

Aisha, like Shayma, also expressed positive views. Aisha is a 36-year-old woman who was born in Baghdad but currently resides in Jordan. She doesn't have a university degree and is currently unemployed. She also considers herself a devout Sunni. Despite the difference in their social backgrounds, Aisha states that 'Americans' impression of Iraqi women is that they are stubborn and do not surrender easily'.

Similarly, Hajjar, a 40-year-old Sunni woman and unemployed mother, believes that US politicians respected Iraqi women because they are the strongest in the Arab world:

The Iraqi woman managed to cope with difficult times and find alternative paths to recovery. She did not leave her job, did not leave her home, she did not pull her children out of school.

¹ The Iraqi-born, internationally-acclaimed, architect.

Unlike Shayma, who emphasizes Iraqi women's modern-ness and, therefore, their affinity with the US, Hajjar stresses Iraqi women's particular characteristics with regards to their family responsibilities. Whilst feminist scholars have criticized US narratives for homogenizing and essentializing Muslim women (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Al-Ali & Pratt 2009; etc.), it is interesting to note that Iraqi women may also essentialize themselves. In Hajjar's case, the reference to a singular Iraqi woman may be an example of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak, 1987, p. 205) to distinguish Iraqi women and affirm her self-identity as an agential Iraqi woman, rather than a victim of US foreign policy.

In other cases, the endorsement of the US foreign policy narrative also enables the speaker to distinguish herself from, rather than to identify with, other Iraqis. For example, Ebtihal is a 55-year-old mother and holds a PhD in Media and Communications. She currently is unemployed but has previously worked with US personnel as a PR manager. While working with US personnel, she recounted a story of being stuck in heavy traffic to demonstrate how her accomplishments had earned her respect from the US:

We reached a checkpoint. One of the Americans recognised that we worked together and noticed that we wanted to buy bread so he went and bought us some. He valued the fact that I worked with them. They respect me. Americans would check all of the houses in my area except mine.

By holding a hegemonic position, Ebtihal was able to highlight her value in terms of viewing herself as an equal US partner.

Obama was almost universally preferred to Bush. Consider Asra's narrative: she is a 43-year-old Sunni woman who holds a teaching diploma. She is married with children and is currently unemployed. It is interesting to note that Asra does not belong to a minority group. Asra singled out Obama as sympathetic on the basis of his perceived Arab/Muslim identity: 'Obama might be more sympathetic because he is ethnically an Arab. So he has feelings. Whereas Bush is a villain. He really did harm Iraqis. He did nothing for women's rights'. Obama has made a concerted effort to counter the myth of his Muslim or non-American identity (Parlett, 2014), and yet ironically it is this myth that endears him to Asra. Asra assumes that Obama can be trusted only because of a perceived shared ethnicity. Thereby, she privileges identity above policies as well as essentializing and reifying an Arab identity. In this respect, she appropriates essentializing and homogenizing dimensions of US foreign policy narratives but reverses them to critique Bush's foreign policy.

Iman is a 27-year-old, university-educated woman born in Jordan to Iraqi parents. She describes herself as Muslim but refuses to affiliate herself with a particular sect. Iman, in contrast, favoured Obama not because of his race but because of his perceived policies and because her experience visiting the US was positive:

President Obama is very different from Bush. In my opinion, Obama is better than Bush because Obama is more peaceful in some respects. He loves peace. He promotes freedom. He's thoughtful to his citizens.

Tala is a 36-year-old Sunni mother. She left Iraq after her father was killed in 2006 and first migrated to Syria before settling in Jordan in 2013. She has no university degree and works as a seamstress at home and also at a salon. Tala has no plans to return to Iraq but wishes to settle in the US where her two brothers currently reside. Tala presents a sympathetic appraisal of Obama based, like Iman's, on his policies rather than his identity. She draws on the testimony of her brothers in America: 'I think Obama mashallah comforted his people. My brothers are comfortable. I feel that Obama is better [than Bush]. Obama is more in touch with people'. These opinions on Obama endorse the view of the US as a land of opportunity, particularly for refugees, but challenge US foreign policy narratives to the degree that they make the US's positive role in the world contingent upon a particular individual (Obama) rather than upon the idea that the US is itself inherently a force for good in the world (the idea of US exceptionalism).

Attitudes towards the US narrative of 'saving' and 'empowering' Iraqi women

The Bush administration narrative on 'saving' was about toppling Saddam Hussein in order to bring democracy, whereas the Obama administration's saving narrative is linked to liberating Iraqi women from Daesh. Only Tala offered a hegemonic position towards the US with regards to the US narrative of saving and empowerment. Tala constructed herself as a victim in need of saving from the US. She has endorsed the narrative of the US removal of Saddam Hussein, but her reasons differed from the US narrative. The Bush administration narrative argued that Saddam Hussein was the source of women's insecurity, whereas Tala's narrative was not gender specific. Instead, it was more to do with the ineffectiveness of the Iraqi government to offer security for Iraqis. Tala believes, 'Saddam destroyed us'. She adds:

Saddam Hussein would threaten to execute soldiers if they refuse to defend [Iraq]. The army would hide between houses and that created repercussions. Saddam was the one who tormented people [...] If he did not lead the Iraqi soldiers to hide between houses [...] A war

should be conducted in a battlefield, don't get them to hide between houses. Those pilots [US] spotted them [Iraqi soldiers] hiding between houses and would start firing.

I asked her whether she faced any challenges after the US invaded Iraq, to which she responded:

There were no difficulties, they did not harm us. The American army did not harm people. I felt that they adored people [...] Americans have sent envoys to comfort the people but once these people [that is, the Iraqi government] intruded [...] I told you, in 2003, 2004, 2005 we lived in security, really, in security. We lived, we ate, and we drank and lived the best life but those who intruded, those, Al-Abadi, Al-Malaki and the likes of them are the ones who created a mess.

Tala views the US in a paternalistic way whilst blaming Iraqis, or specifically the Iraqi government, for the problems facing Iraq. She also endorses the US narrative that those fighting against its presence in Iraq were all terrorists and that the US was fighting them in the interests of the Iraqi people:

Americans would pass by in their military tanks [...] kissing children and offering them sweets. The terrorists on the other hand would frighten them [children] with their rifles. They [Americans] would offer them food and sweets from their own special supplies. They [terrorists] would scare children and tell them not to go near them [Americans] or else they'll offer sweets which are filled with poison and that's a big lie. We had all kinds of terrorists in the past; you would never know who's who, as they are usually clandestine members of Al-Qaida.

Between the US and the 'terrorists', Tala constructs herself as a victim in need of saving. She seeks redemption through migration to the US:

Why do you think I want to live in America? My brothers reside in America and have told me that Americans are better than the ones that are there [in Iraq]. I have two brothers who live there, one of whom has lived there since 2008. My uncle also left for America from Jordan. They are content and have integrated into American society. Mashallah,² they are so comfortable there. I have this desire

² This is an Arabic expression that means god willing, or can be used to express appreciation, joy or thankfulness.

[to live there] because I trust my brothers' judgment. If my brothers weren't comfortable living amongst Americans, they would have told us so. They say they [Americans] are lovely, compassionate, have kind hearts and love children.

Tala's assessment of the US, her endorsement of US 'saving' narratives of both the Bush and Obama administrations, and her rejection of Iraq are indicative of the frustration felt by many Iraqis towards the corruption and ineffectiveness of the Iraqi government. Tala's identification with Iraq is conditioned on the benefits that she perceives herself, or not, as associated with Iraqi nationality.

Attitudes towards the US narrative on its role in bringing democracy and development

In some cases, Iraqi women endorsed US narrative of progress by identifying a lack in Iraqi culture or cultural differences between the US and Iraq. For example, Tala said:

I think that they [US politicians] feel that we should be more progressive but in Iraq there is no progress. Women in Iraq merely eat and drink but in America she would have the opportunity to progress. The Iraqi woman would flourish.

Tala's assumption that Iraqi women could progress in the US does not necessarily mean that she wholly embraces US values, but she echoes the tenets of American cultural superiority that underpin US foreign policy narratives.

Similarly, Ruby, a 38-year-old mother who is a religious Christian and was a doctor before leaving Iraq, recalls the exact date when she left, 18th of August 2014. She has no desire to return to Iraq. Her goal is to migrate to Melbourne, Australia in order to reunite with her husband. The desire to distance herself from Iraq has enabled her to hold a hegemonic position. She opines, 'I imagine they [US politicians] think that both [Iraqi] women and men are regressive and yes, we are like that'. Both Ruby and Tala accept that US politicians have the right to assume Iraqi women are in need of progress; the possibility of mutual respect remains but is stymied by Iraqi women's own limitations due to Iraqi culture.

In some cases, the endorsement of US narratives may reflect US soft power rather than the content of US narratives per se. This is germane to understanding Iraqi women's perceptions of the US attitude to the veil, which were not actually explicitly articulated by US officials. Yet a wide range of Iraqi women expressed an admiration of US liberalism with regard to veiling. For example, Ruby told me: 'I imagine Americans believe in

freedom of expression. If she [an Iraqi woman] decides to wear the veil or not makes no difference to them'. That she imagines this American attitude is telling; she has no tangible evidence but is influenced by her wider perception of US values.

Heba, a 25-year-old Sunni who is quite educated (having studied medicine) and has a stable job working as a University teaching assistant, likewise asserts: 'I do not imagine they think negatively of veiled women. I know that Americans love freedom and personal freedom is important to them'. Shayma echoes this: 'Americans believe in freedom of expression and this reflects their views on the veil'. The narrative of the Freedom Agenda thus informs Iraqi women's perceptions of US attitudes towards veiling, even though US officials largely avoided articulating any position on this issue.

It is easy to interpret such hegemonic stances as evidence of the conditioning of soft power alone. As Joseph Nye (2004, pp. 39–41) describes:

Soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: Its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority. [...] If I am persuaded to go along with your purposes without any explicit threat or exchange-taking place—in short, if my behavior is determined by an observable but intangible attraction—soft power is at work.

While as scholars we must recognise the power relations that underpin hegemonic narratives, we should also recognise that endorsement of these narratives does not necessarily translate into women's passivity. These women are not merely repeating US narratives but are attempting to appropriate them to reclaim their representation and assert their identity even within a broadly hegemonic position.

Negotiated

The occidental perception of women who hold negotiated positions tends to fluctuate between both hegemonic and oppositional views of the US, depending on the particular subject. Negotiated positions like hegemonic positions chart ambivalences, which further destabilize binaries between the US and Iraqi women. Al-Ali (2007, p. 139) argues that, 'Conflict-generated diasporas tend to involve identities that emphasise links to symbolically valuable territory and an aspiration to return once the homeland is freed or conflict has subsided'. While this might hold true in general terms, Iraqi women who are in a transitional migratory position tend not to think about returning home but rather veer towards narrating an optimistic view of US

narratives to fit their migratory ambitions. A negotiated position may reflect moral ambivalence, an attempt to reconcile complex and contradictory experiences, as well as a reluctance to express a clear position that may provoke unfavourable responses.

Abstention as a Decoding Position

In Stuart Hall's decoding theory, he discounted the idea of indifference or abstention. Here I seek to explore and problematize these limitations. It is vital to recognise that Iraqi women need not adopt a position of either for or against. A negotiated position can also stem from a stance of abstention or the avoidance of passing judgement. Jürgen Habermas (1999, p. 417) explains:

Abstention is also a rationally motivated position, just as much as a "yes" or a "no" and in no way relieves us of the necessity of taking a position. Abstention in this context does not really signify a true declaration of neutrality but only signals that we are putting off problems for the time being and wish to suspend our interpretive efforts.

For example, adopting an apolitical view could be classified as an abstaining stance. In this regard, it is worth noting that many Iraqi women who held negotiated positions professed to deliberately avoiding political news and were reluctant to proffer opinions on such matters, focusing instead on less charged subjects.

The preponderance of negotiated and/or abstaining positions on several issues—most notably attitudes to and perceptions of US politicians and democracy in Iraq—reflects the possible risks involved in expressing opinions and/or the vulnerability of the speaker. This notably characterised minority groups such as Christians and Sabaeans, who almost uniformly opted not to comment on American politicians or policies, claiming lack of knowledge or a strong desire to remain neutral. Some Iraqi women from non-minority backgrounds also abstained from certain issues they deemed 'highly political'.

Christina, who is a 71-year-old Christian woman, married with children, was a teacher before retiring. When I asked Christina how she felt about US troops pulling out of Iraq in 2010, she said: 'Americans did not occupy my area and so I haven't witnessed the effects of the war on women or on anyone in general'. Similarly, Christina was wary about passing judgement on Daesh: 'I can't answer your question on how I feel about Americans fighting Daesh'. Christina did not elaborate as to why she preferred not to respond. She may have felt that expressing an opinion on topics over which there are conflicting opinions may open herself up to charges of being on

one side or another. As a member of a religious minority that has been targeted by Daesh, she may have felt that she was vulnerable to being targeted or harassed. Alternatively, in abstaining from these major issues, she could be signalling her separation from the common experience of Iraqi women because of her minority status. This would suggest that abstaining is a mark of alienation from Iraq.

Asra also abstained from stating a position in response to a question of what she thought of US officials; she replied: 'I don't know. I told you I don't like politics and anything that will cause distress to me [...] So I don't know what they did or what they didn't do'. Asra makes clear that she is abstaining from this topic because she deems this to be too risky. The implicit opposition is negotiated through silence and a refusal to fully realise this challenge. This silence is akin to the silent security dilemma of the 'Little Mermaid' in Lene Hansen's critique of securitization theory (2000), whereby to 'speak security' would further endanger the victim of violence. This stance, I argue, can be regarded as a form of agency, because women chose to hold this position as a strategy to resist insecurity.

Another reason for abstention may be because particular events may be of minor importance for particular women, despite their importance to people in the West. For example, consider Samantha, a 40-year-old Christian, single and educated woman. She holds a degree in biology, has worked in the health sector in Iraq previously, but is now unemployed in Jordan. When I asked Samantha whether there was a difference between Bush and Obama, she replied: 'To be honest I can't remember because the wars were continuous'. Her remark implicitly suggests that there isn't a clear enough difference between the Presidents to be worth highlighting. Moreover, her comment points to an experiential gap between researchers based in the West and the interviewees—an event such as a Presidential election and inauguration is attended with mass coverage and significance for the Western researchers but may go unnoticed or be unimportant for the interviewees.

Attitudes towards US officials and personnel

Some of the interviewees problematized certain aspects of US foreign policy; they also recognized that this was not representative of the views of all American people. Indeed, some consciously and carefully distinguished between the American people or the US as a whole and US politicians or particular US policies. In addition, some constructed affinities with particular politicians on the basis of shared identities rather than their specific foreign policies.

In contrast to the differing and negotiated representations of Bush and Obama found in some Iraqi women's narratives, their opinions about female

politicians were in general much more approving. When asked whether there was a difference between the way the Obama and Bush administrations treated women in Iraq, Ruby replied: 'I don't know, you can't form an opinion until you personally have dealt with them. I just don't know'. Ruby then contradicted herself by taking a stance on US female politicians: 'Condoleezza Rice was a real woman. Condoleezza compared to Hillary Clinton was stronger'. Similarly, Heba believes that:

Condoleezza Rice and Hillary are strong people. Under the Bush administration Condoleezza Rice was the head and mastermind of Bush. Hillary is also strong and also has an opinion. She has achieved great things in America. I love Hillary. Her personality is alluring to me.

Whereas some of the interviewees judged male politicians based on their perceived policies, others assessed female politicians based on their perceived character. Heba comments, 'Obama's position is quite negative in terms of the whole [Iraq] situation. He doesn't take a strong position'. Hillary Clinton, who served under the Obama administration, is nonetheless looked upon favourably. Heba thinks Hillary Clinton is strong and has 'achieved great things', while Condoleezza Rice 'was the head and mastermind of Bush.' Tala, who is somewhat reserved about the Bush administration, expressed admiration for Condoleezza Rice, claiming: 'Condoleezza Rice cares about refugees, she gets emotional about it when she sees them [refugees] on the street'. The policies of the male Presidents are condemned, whilst the women who were responsible for developing and implementing these policies were respected as strong, independent and/or sympathetic characters. Moreover, many of the interviewees referred to male politicians by surname but to female politicians by forename, which perhaps indicates a less politicised and more personal view of women politicians and suggests that they identify with female US politicians on the basis of their gender.

This sense of solidarity with certain US figures was also expressed in relation to US personnel stationed in Iraq. Perhaps paradoxically, some Iraqi women perceived US personnel in Iraq as victims. Several of the interviewees made clear that they differentiated between US politicians and US personnel. Heba for instance recognises that some of the US personnel involved in the controversial war were just following orders from their commanders. I asked her whether she had met any US officials or US soldiers, to which she replied:

No, not politicians, but the army, yes. I can't speak about the US army in a general way. They are people just like us. The soldiers I met were nice [...] Most troops upon returning to America have

realised that it [the war] was a lie. They thought they were fighting for peace but realised it wasn't the case. They were also the victims.

Heba empathizes with US soldiers on the basis of a shared victimhood and, in so doing, challenges US narratives about the war. Not only did the war fail to save Iraqi women, it turned them into victims and also turned US troops from rescuers to victims of their own politicians.

Shatha is a 24-year-old from Baghdad, who holds a degree in genetic engineering. She similarly made a clear distinction between US politicians and their citizens:

The American people are different from their government. I can't say whether the government distinguishes between Muslims, Afghanis and Iraqis. The American people however do. My relatives and friends say that Americans are friendly. They do not cause disturbance or anything of that sort.

Iman, like Shatha, also illustrates a view of Americans that negotiates between the positive experience in America and the negative experience in Iraq:

I like Americans but I don't like their politics. They colonised my country even if I don't live in it, it's still my country [...] In America they did not treat me as an Iraqi or Arab or Muslim. I would tell them I am Iraqi; they would welcome me.

Ebtihal complicates her attitudes towards the US by differentiating between what she perceives Obama accomplished in Iraq versus what he accomplished in the US:

Obama did nothing for Iraqi women. The only thing I heard is that refugees who move to America have a good life. Iraqi women there are appreciated, and they receive an allowance. For example, as a mature woman I would receive an allowance. They would help cover my treatments as I suffer from heart problems. Obama just pulled his troops out and allowed the killings to fester [...] That is what Obama did.

Ebtihal's attitudes towards Obama appears to be conditioned by her expectations of the role that the US should play in protecting and providing security, particularly to the women of Iraq.

Many Iraqi women demonstrated ambivalence in their attitudes to the US and its actions in Iraq. In some cases, their attitudes towards the US were contingent upon the perceived policies of particular individuals. In other

cases, it was contingent upon their affinity or not with particular individuals based on a perceived shared identity.

Attitudes towards the US narrative of 'saving' and 'empowering' Iraqi women

Some of the interviewees held ambivalent views about US narratives on Iraqi women. Sameera explains that she believes that US politicians make no effort to distinguish between Iraqi women and Arab women in general: 'The Arab woman is perceived as backwards; her sole purpose is to please her husband in bed and take care of domestic chores'. Sameera doesn't think the opinions of women matter to Americans: 'If it did then they wouldn't seek to destroy the Iraqi woman and her future'. Paradoxically, however, Sameera believes that Americans do distinguish between Iraqi and Afghani women. In her view:

Americans know that Iraqis are more enlightened, civilized and educated than Afghani women and the evidence for this is that American men married Iraqi women but I never heard of American soldiers marrying Afghani women.

Sameera negotiates her view of US narratives about 'Muslim women' between a recognition of the failure of US narratives to distinguish Iraqi women from other Arab women and simultaneously an acknowledgement that the US has differentiated between Iraqi and Afghan women. Yet, she endorses this differentiation on the basis of a racialized hierarchy in which she positions Iraqi women above Afghan women, thereby perpetuating the same racializing logics as US narratives. Similarly, Ebtihal also suggested that Iraqis are more educated than Afghans, which is why the US differentiated between Afghan and Iraqi women and why the US sought to destroy Iraq:

They don't treat Afghan women and Iraqi women similarly. The Afghan people are complicated because the Taliban isolated them. But when it comes to us, Americans did good and bad. Their plan was to kill most of our scientists and researchers; the rest left for Europe and the US They killed the most educated because they want to destroy Iraq. The good part is that they welcome the educated to America. They even opened their doors to Iraqi officers in the army to live over there.

In perceiving that the US differentiated between Iraqi women and Afghani women, Ebtihal voiced a confused and contradictory view. She believes Americans deliberately killed most Iraqi scientists with the intention of ravaging Iraq yet has also welcomed the educated survivors to its shores.

This may reflect her wider view of how the US has dealt with the Iraqi situation; it invaded Iraq, it killed Iraqis, but it welcomed refugees.

Thus, the interviewees expressed resentment towards perceived US attitudes to Muslim or Arab women, challenging the culturalizing logic that underpins these. Nonetheless, they also aligned themselves with US values in order to present Iraqi women as superior to Afghani women, reinforcing the same culturalizing logic.

Attitudes towards the US narrative on its role in bringing democracy and development

Some women voted or professed hope that democracy will one day be realized. The attitudes of the interviewees toward democracy are based on their different understanding of democracy from US politicians. The Bush administration claimed that they were bringing democracy to Iraq by introducing elections and a multiparty system in which women could participate as both voters and members of parliament. In contrast, the interviewees viewed voting as an empty mechanism unless and until more fundamental reform of Iraqi institutions is realized. Thus, while many of the women I interviewed voted in recent Iraqi elections, this doesn't necessarily indicate support for the model of democracy introduced by the US. They voted out of despair rather than belief in the system.

For instance, Hanady is a 67-year-old Sunni with four children, one of which has died. She settled in Jordan in 2004 and highlights the fact that she comes from a privileged background. As her father was an Ambassador, she completed her GCSEs in England. She is currently involved in humanitarian work in Jordan, helping Iraqi refugees. She, like Sameera, holds the view that:

There is no democracy in Iraq so how would I be able to participate in it? I voted but votes do not matter. In the end votes are manipulated. They [US officials] instate whomever they please. Whether we vote or do not vote we get the same outcome.

The position thus serves as a condemnation of the Bush administration for not implementing their stated objectives of democracy-making with integrity.

Similarly, Abeer takes a negotiated position in relation to the US role in bringing democracy and development:

Americans did not bring any kind of freedom at all. Americans did not bring change to Iraqi women, Iraqi men or Iraqi children. Quite

the contrary, we regressed to the state we were at one thousand years ago.

Whilst Abeer does not necessarily think that the US brought democracy and development, she nevertheless expressed a need for the US to remain in order to guarantee future democracy and development:

I was not happy when they pulled out of Iraq because they invaded Iraq, destroyed it and then left without sorting out the mess they created. I hope Americans return so that they clean up the mess they left behind.

Shayma alternatively suggests cultural reasons for the failure of democracy in Iraq:

I work for democracy in Iraq and I am the head of the first feminist organisation—focusing primarily on women's interests and spreading democracy—in my district. However, democracy differs from one country to another. The democracy I envisaged for Iraq has yet to exist. The democracy that the US tried to introduce did not take into account Iraqi cultural sensitivities and particularities [...] I voted but voting took place before the constitution was completed.

Whilst Shayma endorsed democracy in terms of an abstract concept, she objected to the way in which it had been implemented in Iraq. This position is rooted in a commitment to democracy in Iraq, therefore endorsing US foreign policy narratives about the desire for democracy and freedom in the Middle East, including Iraq; however, it challenges the notion of a universal model of democracy (in the case of Shayma) or it challenges the notion that the US is an agent of democratization, thereby not fully endorsing US narratives.

Oppositional

The oppositional position can complicate the way in which Iraqi women interpret hegemonic knowledge about them. It can also challenge the way in which the literature has understood their oppositional position. For instance, the women who held an oppositional position did not refute the idea of being saved.

What is more, focusing on how Iraqi women construct Occidental images of the West produced a number of crucial points. Often scholars choose to highlight an oppositional stance against hegemonic power to demonstrate the idea of agency as resistance. Indeed, some Iraqi women did resist by deploying similar reductive binary tactics in order to make Americans seem as insignificant. What my research has also found is that holding an

oppositional position did not always correspond to a sense of empowerment. For instance, some interviewees have expressed ideas that do not exist and are rooted in conspiracy theories. This most directly exposes their vulnerability and their sense of fear of the Other.

Attitudes towards US officials and personnel

Sameera insisted American politicians do not deserve to be distinguished or presented in a good light; all are equally suspect. She believes the difference between Bush and Obama is simple: 'one is black and the other is white, and besides that they are both equally culpable'. She explains:

Bush was daring, he wanted to appear brave in order to gain fame and recognition. Bush started it all and Obama is trying to complete his mission in a less pronounced way, not because he was more peaceful, but he is this way so as to avoid infuriating the American public as they are fed up of their games. The American public would not allow more American troops to be killed and so American politicians are plotting to turn Iraqis against each other instead.

While she thinks Obama treats Iraqis more cynically than Bush, this is only an extension of the latter's policy and not a revision of it. Sameera has heard that Obama admires Haifa Wehbe, a very glamorous Lebanese singer, and that he even met her, prompting the sardonic reflection: 'Women's rights can be granted to you if you're beautiful. He'll give *her* rights [...] Everyone I know shares the same opinion'. Sameera likewise deliberately refuses to distinguish between the two administrations or indeed between Americans in general:

I hate them [Americans], they don't deserve the effort of distinguishing between them or to recognize decent people amongst them. In reality, I'm sure some of them are okay. Some troops were forced to fight. He's [American soldier] here to earn a living, to receive his pay cheque. Whenever I come across soldiers they look mortified. They are always on the look for enemies and are ready to kill. They don't feel secure themselves.

Sameera purposefully constructs a monolithic image of the US, even as she simultaneously concedes that they are not all the same, in order to emphasize her rejection of US foreign policy and foreign policy narratives. Whilst this is an act of refusal, it is based on similar homogenizing logics as those of US narratives about Iraq, the Muslim world and Arabs.

Abeer is a 40-year-old, university educated, mother of three and describes herself as both Sunni and Shia. When asked about what she thought of US officials and personnel, she initially differentiates between different US

politicians: 'Hillary Clinton did not get too involved in the Iraq war but Condoleezza Rice is guilty of decaying Iraq with her politics'. She then reversed her statement: '[Hillary Clinton and Condoleezza Rice] were both involved in what's going on in Iraq. They are part of the team which destroyed Iraq'. Hanady also perceives no difference between different US administrations:

I imagine they are the same [Obama and Bush administrations]. There is no difference. [My opinion of them] is indifferent. They are leaders who only serve their country's economic interest, so that they keep participating in arms trading. Every other year they start a new war in a different country so that the young and unemployed join the army and are able to receive a good salary – and we are the terrorists and they [soldiers] are made to believe that they have to fight them [terrorists].

Hanady's oppositional position is constructed through a monolithic and negative representation of the US, which exposes the extent of their wrongdoing. In this instance, victimhood is not to be understood as a merely weak and helpless position but as one that pinpoints the US's transgressions, demonstrates how US politicians have manipulated their own people, and thereby subverts the supposed superiority of the US.

Attitudes towards the US narrative of 'saving' and 'empowering' Iraqi women

The US narrative that intervention in Iraq was justified in order to save women from the hands of a barbaric dictatorship was generally not endorsed or even recognized by the women that I interviewed. Opposition was premised not on a positive defence of the previous regime, but on condemnation of the actions of US personnel, the effects of the US occupation or the ignorance of Americans. As previously discussed, many of the interviewees perceived favourable treatment in US narratives. However, there was a minority who perceived US representations of Iraq and Iraqis as negative. For example, Abeer said:

The way they imagined us and still imagine us [Iraqi women] is of living in the Stone Age. Yes, they invaded with the intention of spreading democracy and all that, but that was all empty talk [...] Despite the invasion that happened, there are Americans who do not know where Iraq is or anything about Iraq [...] and yet Americans think we are regressive!

Ebtihal shares Abeer's views and challenges US narratives of 'saving Iraqi women' by asserting Iraq's modernity and highlighting the achievements of Iraqi women:

The image they have of the Iraqi woman is regressive and not advanced or educated. They [Americans] do not know that Iraq is an advanced and civilized country; we have our female doctors, engineers, professors and scientists and many more.

Similarly, Bushra states:

I imagine they perceive us as backwards. They do not see us as conscious and educated people. They imagine us as an ignorant and barbaric mob and they [US] are here to civilize us [...] Most of the accomplished American scientists have Iraqi roots. The best doctors, politicians and engineers from around the world can trace their roots back to Iraq. They do not consider immigrants from Iraq to be Iraqi, only ones who live in Iraq are backwards. This image could not be further from reality.

Bushra perceives that US narratives echo historical colonial discourses, in which the non-Western world is constructed as ‘backward’ and in need of ‘civilization’. By contrast, Bushra constructs Iraqis as the most civilized. Moreover, where other women have lauded the US for receiving Iraqi migrants, Bushra condemns the US for accepting Iraqi migrants in order to appropriate their achievements of Iraqis. Bushra’s opposition to the US is constructed through a monolithic and hyperbolic representation of Iraq and Iraqis, thereby reversing the homogenizing logics of perceived US narratives about Iraq.

Others spoke about how the US occupation itself had been negative for women. Hajjar said:

Americans blocked access to roads, which prevented women from going to work or university. There are families who have restricted their female relatives from attending school, university or work because people consider these places to be a foreign occupation.

Hajjar rejects the notion that Iraqi women are victims of Iraqi patriarchal oppression, but rather blames the US occupation for restrictions placed on women. Bushra also blames the American presence for restricting female mobility:

As a big family we prefer travelling by car instead of plane, as it’s more affordable to be honest. So we travel by car [...] to Baghdad. If the journey normally takes 6 hours, it would take up to 10 hours if a tank column appears. We are not permitted to walk freely in the street if there are American tank columns visible [...] Americans don’t account for complicated situations. They will not make any

exceptions even if a woman wants to give birth. They prefer her to give birth in the car but not to overtake the American tank column.

Ebtihal spoke about direct violence committed by US soldiers:

The Bush administration helped get rid of Saddam Hussein [...] They did not do anything for women. Americans raped and killed an Iraqi girl by the name of Abeer in Muhammadiyah and they were tried in America. A lot [of US soldiers] developed mental illnesses from the things they were exposed to in Iraq.

Ebtihal also spoke of her personal experience of restrictions imposed by US personnel:

Americans did not permit us veiled women to wear the hijab to work. Anyone who works for parliament is banned from wearing it. There are cameras installed to examine our bodies. We were against that kind of inspection but their excuse was [that it was] to ensure that we weren't carrying any weapons. I later found out that those cameras expose women's bodies and they sometimes had dogs sniff you. You know this is not Islamic. I refused to be searched in that manner.

In contradistinction to those women who believed that the US was accepting of veiled women, Aisha believed that 'Americans portray all veiled women as terrorists. Sameera agreed, adding: 'There's a YouTube video which has recently been posted, of an American man beating a veiled woman'. These statements are constructed on the basis of a monolithic representation of the US as well as the perception that the US government and ordinary Americans do not differentiate between veiled women.

Ebtihal's earlier position, in which she stated that Americans who knew her through work respected her and did not search her house, is contradicted by her direct criticisms of US personnel. On the one hand, Ebtihal views Iraqis as victims of the US invasion and occupation. On the other hand, she refuses to see herself as a victim, as illustrated by her stated refusal to comply with US security measures.

A different challenge to US narratives was presented by Ruby, who highlighted the plight of Christians as a result of the US occupation:

We Christians are peaceful but when Americans were in Iraq, people assumed that Americans are Christians and therefore we must have collaborated with them and this made us vulnerable. Christians got killed. A lot fled persecution during the war. They blamed us because they considered us 'kiffar' [infidels] like Americans.

Indeed, following the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, it is estimated that Iraq's Christian community dropped from approximately 1.3 million to 500,000 residing in Iraq as of 2010 (US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2010).

Moreover, the narrative of 'empowering' Iraqi women was also challenged by the complaints of some of the interviewees regarding the lack of US assistance and humanitarian aid for Iraqi women. None of the Iraqi women I interviewed directly received any form of aid from the US. Hanady is privileged enough to be able to provide aid to the less fortunate, and her humanitarian work shapes how she regards foreign aid. According to her, the US has not provided any assistance to Iraqis:

I personally did not get affected [...] but I am irritated by what's happening to the refugees. Every day I receive distressing messages on WhatsApp. The vast majority, which includes young girls, are suffering from illnesses and can't receive treatment. The problem is there is no aid or funding in Iraq. Even Caritas [a confederation of 165 Catholic relief] helped with operations and provided medicine but they have currently stopped their support. Even the U.N.D.P [United Nations Development Programme] used to give out an allowance, that fund now goes to Syrians [...] Children used to go to state schools in Jordan but this year [...] Iraqis are required to pay their children's tuition fees or else they face expulsion [...] Americans were only here to destroy Iraqi people.

Hanady adds:

In Jordan, England and everywhere you'll find Iraqis united to help each other out. But Americans have only observed.

Hanady thus refutes the US narrative of bringing development to Iraq and emphasizes instead the agency of the Iraqi diaspora in this regard. However, clearly some Iraqis are more agential than others in this regard because of the vastly different humanitarian circumstances facing different Iraqi women. In this respect, Hanady also suggests the need to differentiate between Iraqi women in terms of their experiences.

Attitudes towards the US narrative on its role in bringing democracy and development

Some of the interviewees completely refused the narrative that the US had brought democracy and development to Iraq, instead emphasizing that the US invasion and US policies had led to insecurity and a lack of development. Others opposed the act of voting, as they believe it is not

effective. Some once thought they had the opportunity to make a difference by voting, but the outcome deflated their hope. This was either on the grounds that the US had actively undermined democracy through manipulation of election results, or through the failure of the US to build or support Iraqi state institutions, or because of a failure to take into account Iraqi cultural particularities. Moreover, opposition to US foreign policy narratives was very apparent in relation to the subject of the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in 2011.

For example, Sameera is a 46-year-old, has a degree in mechanical engineering, and is a mother of three children. She describes herself as a religious Sunni but sees no difference between different sects of Islam. Troubled by the war, Sameera decided to leave Iraq. She first moved to Syria for 8 months before settling in Jordan where she is currently based. At the time of the interview she had no official job but worked secretly for a charity supporting refugee Iraqi families. When asked about whether she voted or participated in democracy, Sameera echoed this sense of US-imposed democracy as fraudulent:

I did not vote at the Iraqi election, as I was not in the country around that time. Everyone I knew including myself backed Ayad Allawi [...] He's fair and doesn't espouse the politics of favouritism [...] He's a British-educated Shia man. Most Iraqis were sure he would succeed but because he failed to gain American support, he did not win. After which I decided never to participate in elections.

Heba was totally dismissive of US promises of bringing democracy to Iraq: 'they [US officials] did not do anything. They were sent to create a federal state or something like that. They are full of talk and no action'. However, she not only blames the US but also those Iraqis who collaborated with the US:

They [US officials] brought their own politicians and their own Iraqis to represent us. Yes, they did allow us to vote [...] but the elections were fraudulent [...] They have installed them [Iraqi politicians] into power and later decided they were not apt to govern.

By using the term, 'their own Iraqis', Heba suggests that anyone who aligns with the US political project in Iraq cannot be considered a true Iraqi, thereby drawing a distinction between authentic versus inauthentic Iraqis.

Heba's attitudes towards the US-installed democracy and those that participated in it may be linked to what she has experienced as an assault on her position as part of the Sunni community, which was marginalized by the

US and its Iraqi allies after 2003 on the assumption that they must have been supporters of Saddam Hussein.

Ebtihal further expounds on the underlying flaws that render Iraq's democracy unsuccessful:

I did not vote. I do not think our parliament is a successful one; rather it's a failure. The parliament has no authority, power or meaning. The government did nothing for their citizens. They were not able to provide us with water, electricity or employment. People are afraid to leave their house. Americans were not involved in improving the situation. They would work and then return to their hotels. Maybe soldiers helped out but not other Americans that I worked with.

Ebtihal finds voting irrelevant, since the state has failed to provide basic necessities. She therefore implicitly links the idea of democracy to the ability of government to provide necessary services and security to its citizens. Moreover, Ebtihal believes that US personnel failed to help, thereby challenging the narrative of the US narrative as an agent of democracy and development, not only in Iraq but globally. Where Sameera and Heba to one extent or another believe that the US has actively interfered to undermine democracy, Ebtihal instead believes that the US has stood by passively, neglecting to support Iraqi institutions.

Many Iraqi women expressed opposition to the US withdrawal. The interviewees referred largely to the period under the presidency of Obama. The Obama administration's determination to end the combat mission in Iraq and simultaneously refrain from the discussion of Iraqi women's rights underwent a significant U-turn in 2014 with the dramatic emergence of Daesh. As pressure mounted on the administration to counter this terrorist threat to the region, the rights of women in Iraq reappeared in the remarks of US politicians pushing for public approval of airstrikes on Daesh targets in Syria and Iraq. The previously discarded foreign policy meta-narrative of the Bush administration—of a 'War on Terror' supported by a foundational narrative of 'saving' victimized women—resurfaced, but in slightly different forms, reflecting the altered nature of the enemy.

Reasons given by the interviewees for opposition to US withdrawal of US troops were not unified. However, in key respects, their responses could be organized into three categories. First, some women were in fact content to see US troops pull out of Iraq, though for reasons which do not accord with the US narrative. Second, some did not believe that the US actually pulled out of Iraq, and are convinced that it was a subterfuge for sinister and clandestine political operations. Third, a few were both respectful of and satisfied with the US's decision to leave but are now confronted with the

chaos this left behind. These three oppositional attitudes to the withdrawal of the American military presence attest to the different perspectives Iraqi women have on the US, but all challenge the narrative that the US mission in Iraq had ended and that Iraqis were ready to take responsibility for their security.

Shayma for instance was glad the US troops withdrew, but for reasons different from the US narrative:

We were very happy to see the US withdrawing its troops from Iraq. Americans accidentally killed civilians and the Iraqi army because they kept missing their target. It was far from a smooth operation.

In other words, she challenges the notion that US troops were ever supporting Iraqi security and, rather, were contributing to insecurity.

Other women opposed the US narrative of withdrawal because they believed it to be an outright falsehood. According to Sameera 'They publicly announced they would leave, but their presence was still felt. I imagine that all Iraqis feel this way'. She believed the withdrawal was fabricated and that the US publicly announced their departure whilst maintaining a more clandestine operation.

Similarly, Asra mirrors Sameera's argument by arguing that the US withdrawal resulted in mayhem whilst simultaneously claiming that US interests prevent them from leaving:

Americans won't pull out. There is no way Americans will leave an Arab area. The whole world knows this. When Americans left they created sectarianism [...] There wasn't any sectarianism in the past; if there was, it was at a minor scale.

Asra contests the US narrative that Iraqis have gained autonomy, which the Obama administration sought to establish, by claiming that the rise of sectarian tensions has been created by the US, either deliberately or unintentionally, which enables its continuing involvement. She too desires the final, and total, withdrawal of US personnel and yet simultaneously fears the consequences. Heba also expresses ambivalence about the US withdrawal:

I wasn't happy. The experience was very absurd. They came to Iraq, created a havoc [...] It was best that we got rid of this [US] control [...] But when the US troops pulled out it [Iraq] turned into a jungle.

Thus, despite their unilateral opposition to US narratives on withdrawal, Iraqi women are divided on exactly what the flaws in this narrative are. For

some, it is rooted in the destruction that Americans brought and a gladness they have gone; or it is rooted in the destruction their withdrawal engendered; for others, it is rooted in a sense that Americans remain and insidiously plot further destruction. All these different attitudes demonstrate that these women view the US as all-powerful and the Iraqi state and Iraqis as powerless. These assumptions also underpin attitudes towards Daesh.

Every Iraqi woman I interviewed held Daesh to be a negative or hostile force, though their views on Daesh's origins and nature differed, with conspiracy theories particularly salient. The conspiracy theories put forward by the women that I interviewed mirrored conspiracy theories heard more broadly in Jordan and other Arab countries. These conspiracy theories might serve as alternative narratives to the US's hegemonic narrative, regardless of their feasibility. As Gray (2010, p. 5) observes, 'conspiracy theory or conspiracism [can be regarded] as the act of developing and sustaining a discourse, usually a counter-discourse, which challenges conventional or accepted explanations for events'. In particular, the discrepancy in power between the US and Iraqis provides a fertile context for the emergence of conspiracy theories.

The conspiracy theory that Daesh has been deployed as an American tool to destabilise Iraq was common among the women I interviewed. I asked Asra what enabled Daesh to spread, and she replied: 'So that Americans gain control. They are the ones that brought them and want them to spread in order to control Iraq. They just want to kill the Iraqi people'. Hanady similarly presents Daesh as a non-Iraqi force, facilitated by Americans, and she also accuses Iranians of having had a hand in this:

When he [Saddam] left, Iranians governed us. They [Iranians] dishonoured us. They are loyal to Iran [...] Americans brought them [...] When they [Americans] left I thought it would force Iraq to stand on its feet and things will move smoothly. We thought the Americans were the occupiers. But things became worse. It's a film.³ Americans brought Daesh and they're pretending to fight them. It's a game they are playing in order to annihilate Sunnis in Iraq. All the areas they are taking over are Sunni.

Hanady suggests Iran is an American ally (although in the West the two countries are considered foes) and the two countries colluded on the rise of Daesh in order to victimize Sunnis and splinter and weaken the country. Her reference to Iranians governing Iraq refers to the Shia-led Iraqi government and her perception (alongside other Sunni Iraqis) that Iraq's Shia are not loyal to Iraq because of their religious identity. Her own position as a Sunni

³ This is an idiomatic phrase common in Arabic which loosely translates as 'it's unreal', or 'it almost feels real but is fictitious'.

possibly influences this conception, since Hanady felt marginalized within Iraq because of her religious identity. She makes no mention of other minorities who are also under threat from Daesh. Moreover, Hanady's fear of Daesh is therefore shaped primarily by her religious identity within the context of Iraq, rather than by her gender, despite the many reports of Daesh violence against women. This in a way is a counter-narrative to the US, which has emphasized the threat Daesh poses to all Iraqi women, particularly the barbaric threat of sexual violence.

Sameera, a Sunni, also regards Daesh as a product of malign foreign powers taking advantage of Iraq's instability: 'Daesh is an Israeli-formed organisation and is supported by the Americans'. That Sameera, like Hanady, attributes the rise of Daesh to outside forces rather than any Iraqi factors operates to downplay the responsibility of Iraqis for this destructive force as well as reiterate the external threats facing Iraq. Shayma similarly asserts that foreign powers are seeking to destroy all Iraqis:

The reports I read confirm that Daesh is an American product [...] Americans even transport food to Daesh. This war is to serve the interest of America. America is not after Daesh but the Iraqi army.

Bushra is a 40-year-old who has not completed any formal education. Often, education is an indicator of class, but in her case this does not apply. She comes from a middle-class background, as her father was an engineer and her mother worked for the Ministry of Planning. She is a Shia, who left prior to the 2003 invasion. She fled persecution by Saddam Hussein with her children and husband to settle in Jordan. Despite having not experienced Daesh rule, she still holds strong views that the rise of Daesh is the latest in a long history of US manipulation of regional events:

In Iraq, we all know that Daesh was brought over by them [Americans]. Saddam and Bin Laden were fostered by Americans and were then sent to us. Daesh was not any different. Saddam was America's puppet. He followed their orders. For example, they ordered him to bomb Iran and so he did. They instructed him on when to end the war. They also ordered him to invade Kuwait and he did [...] Even Osama from Saudi Arabia was backed by America. And to be honest it's not even America [that controls them]. It's free masons that Americans instruct as well. Free masons are the real political enemies. It's not only our enemy but also the whole world's enemy. They are not just against Iraq or Arabs but the whole world. Our first and only enemies are free masons.

Bushra's narrative, constructing a far-reaching and broad conspiracy theory, reflects her incomprehension and sense of powerlessness in relation to reoccurring episodes of barbaric and destabilizing violence. Attitudes

towards Daesh are not only shaped the actual impact of the organization but also a wider set of anxieties about the lack of Iraqi sovereignty and the negative impact of outside powers.

Conclusion

In line with feminist standpoint theory, this chapter has prioritized Iraqi women's own narratives and experiences in order to reveal alternative knowledge about US foreign policy towards Iraq after 2003. In particular, Iraqi women's narratives have highlighted that there is no clear periodization between US presidents in how Iraqi women experienced US foreign policy. Moreover, this chapter has demonstrated how Iraqi women's narratives disrupt hegemonic knowledge about their representations as a result of the multiplicity of their decoding positions. This not only challenges the assumptions of US foreign policy makers but also corrects the tendency of postcolonial feminists to focus on hegemonic discourses rather than the narratives of those who are the object of those hegemonic discourses.

Using Hall's approach of hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional positions, I identified patterns in how Iraqi women perceive US foreign policy narratives. Interestingly, most of the interviewees held hegemonic or negotiated positions on most themes. None of these positions can be regarded as absolute, and a degree of ambiguity attaches to each woman's narrative. However, attributing these positions still identifies helpful trends without simplifying the complexities inherent in the multiple positions and viewpoints available to these women. This finding is important, as it demonstrates that we cannot assume that Iraqi women's narratives represent an oppositional stance. Therefore, a more complex reading is needed in order to better understand Iraqi women's narratives. This finding also problematizes Said's Orientalism, which essentially places the relationship between the West and East or Iraqi women and US officials into the dichotomy of powerful vs powerless—this does not allow room for ambiguity to be recognized. This chapter demonstrates that adopting Occidentalism allows us to approach power relations in a complex way.

These findings build on the existing literature that has examined the US representations of Muslim women since 9/11. However, these neglected the women who have been instrumentalized in US representations and made assumptions about Muslim women's agency: namely, that they unanimously oppose US narratives about them. This chapter has helped to fill this gap by demonstrating that studying the Occidental positions of Iraqi women allows us to think beyond binary oppositions. My findings demonstrate that Iraqi women have not attained wholly negative attitudes towards US narratives. In fact, Iraqi women have endorsement or semi-endorsement of US narratives. This should not necessarily be interpreted as a form of passivity

or necessarily reflective of subordination. Rather, this chapter has demonstrated that women's position towards US narratives were often part of a strategy to empower themselves vis-à-vis other actors. Moreover, in some cases hegemonic or negotiated positions demonstrated nuanced attitudes towards issues such as US foreign policies and democracy. Even in those cases where women abstained from expressing an opinion out of fear for their safety or possible negative repercussions, this should also be considered a form of agency.

Meanwhile, oppositional positions often rested on rather monolithic representations of the US, thereby reproducing an ahistorical binary of us vs them that mirrored the logics underpinning Orientalist discourses. In addition, some oppositional positions were linked to conspiracy theories or narratives that emphasized a lack of agency. In this sense, the narratives of the interviewees complicate notions of agency, empowerment and relations to hegemonic narratives, demonstrating the value of feminist standpoint theory.

The findings of my interviews also emphasized the heterogeneity of Iraqi women, in terms of their attitudes towards the US and its policies. These interviews therefore are illustrative of the degree to which highlighting individual narratives and the particulars of each women's situation has undermined a collective Iraqi identity, let alone an Iraqi 'sisterhood'. I thus argue that there is a need to recognise personal circumstances and to resist categorizing women.

Iraqi women's alternative knowledge, and their prioritization of different themes from those maintained by US narratives, are explored in the following chapter, which discusses how Iraqi women prioritize security more than the abstract values, such as progress and women's rights, which the US has often championed. These are considered a privilege rather than a necessity, and while lauded, are not understood as central to how Iraqi women measure the US's role and value in Iraq. The following chapter will examine the notion of intersectional identities to demonstrate its importance in making sense of such complex experiences and alternative knowledge.

Chapter Five: Iraqi women's narratives of the violence and conflicts in Iraq since 2003

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the attitudes and perceptions of the Iraqi women interviewees in relation to US foreign policy narratives and US foreign policies. Chapter Three demonstrated the complex relationships between Iraqi women and the US administration, which goes beyond binaries of domination/subordination or domination/resistance, in contradistinction to both US foreign policy narratives as well as critiques of US foreign policy narratives. The previous chapter was, therefore, primarily concerned with Iraqi women's relationships with the US. By contrast, this chapter considers how the interviewees narrated their own experiences of war and conflict in Iraq since 2003.

This chapter thus seeks to address my project's secondary question of: *How do narratives of Iraqi women reveal the relationship between security and identity?* I do this by focusing on women's narratives and experiences since the 2003 US invasion. In answering my secondary research question, this chapter will also address my main research question about challenging dominant US narratives. As noted in the previous chapter, US government discourses claimed that they were 'saving Iraqi women' and bringing security through freedom from dictatorship. The chapter challenges these claims by complicating ideas of Security and Freedom as highlighted in Iraqi women's narratives.

It also challenges traditional security approaches. In this respect, it draws on Feminist Security Studies, particularly with regards to thinking beyond conventional, or state, security as it deploys the narratives of the interviewees to highlight alternative or potentially counter-hegemonic notions of security.

I will argue that the idea of human security should take seriously a feminist standpoint theory approach together with the study of intersectional identities and narratives in relation to security, in order to develop our understanding of the concepts of security and agency. I also argue for the importance of linking both theory and empirical research using a narrative and intersectional frame in order to highlight the importance of a context-based understanding of security and to examine the relationship between Iraqi women's identities and security. I shall conclude by assessing how prioritizing alternative knowledge as an epistemological direction has disrupted existing knowledges about Iraqi women. Finally, I will highlight

the implication of my study for the field of IR and Security Studies, and Feminist IR and Feminist Security Studies, more specifically.

Since this chapter will discuss three of the seven sub-themes of security of the UNDP's definition of human security: economic, community and personal, a closer look at these three terms is needed to understand how the present project diverges from these common perceptions of security. According to UNDP: 1) *personal security* stresses preventing physical violence from the state, other states, individual, groups, self, threats directed against women and children. 2) *Community security* includes ethnic tensions, and highlights how one derives 'security from their membership in a group – a family, a community, an organization, a racial or ethnic group that can provide a cultural identity and a reassuring set of values' (UNDP 1994, p. 31). 3) *Economic security* is defined as assuring a basic income through job security or as a last resort through public funds. While efforts by the UNDP to breakdown the idea of human security into subsets of security themes is an important move away from broad brush language, these ideas are still problematic, as they are rooted in abstraction and remain vague.

I have thus categorized women's narratives according to the different types of human security: namely, personal security, community security and economic security. My categorization is an effort to order their narratives. However, to guard against imposing a false sense of coherence or homogeneity, I highlight the contradictions and disagreements found within different narrative themes. It is my hope, therefore, that in discussing broader narratives I bring out common themes or trends but do not iron out complexities or individualities.

Building on the work of Maria Stern (2005) and Annick Wibben (2011), the chapter considers women's understandings of security as constructed through their identities, since 'securing something requires its identification' (Wibben, 2011, p. 105).

Both this and the previous chapter seek to amplify Iraqi women's agency by demonstrating the value of feminist standpoint theory as an epistemology in enabling us to recognize agency. In the previous chapter, agency was understood as how the interviewees positioned themselves in relation to the US. In this chapter, Iraqi women's agency is considered in terms of how they chose to narrate their security. As Stern notes: 'the people with whom we [researchers] converse also wield power over, *what*, *whether* and *how* they choose to narrate' (Stern, 2005, p. 67). Stern (1997, p. 128) also argues:

Treating in/security as a construction site of political identities, whereby in writing in/security, the subjects write themselves, their histories, and their visions of a better future (a more 'secure' world), indicates the political nature of the assignment of threat and danger,

as well as safety and well-being. In/security thus can be seen as an ontological yet contingent condition of identity.

Thus, I will also explore the idea of how security can also be thought of as a site of agency and serve as an illuminating way of understanding an individual's identity. I will adopt the idea that: 'They are certainly also agents in forming their stories' (Stern, 2005 p. 67). In recognizing how the interviewees chose to define their own insecurities, I seek to avoid a prescriptive definition of agency. In this way, I am able to recognise Iraqi women's agency beyond the parameters of US narratives as well as feminist theorizing. As Saba Mahmood (2005, pp. 14–5) argues in relation to the Egyptian women's mosque movement, it is important to understand women's agency in relation to their particular socio-cultural and political context and not some universal, abstract notion:

we recognize that the desire for freedom from, or subversion of, norms is not an innate desire that motivates all beings at all times, but is also profoundly mediated by cultural and historical conditions, then the question arises: how do we analyse operations of power that construct different kinds of bodies, knowledge, and subjectivities whose trajectories do not follow the entelechy of liberatory politics? Put simply, my point is this: if the ability to effect change in the world and in oneself is historically and culturally specific (both in terms of what constitutes 'change' and the means by which it is effected), then the meaning and sense of agency cannot be fixed in advance, but must emerge through an analysis of the particular concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility, and effectivity. Viewed in this way, what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency—but one that can be understood only from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment.

Therefore, agency cannot be predetermined. This points to the need for contextualisation, which helps to conceive agency in non-Western centric ways, as well as in unpredictable ways.

In particular, Mahmood (2005, pp. 14–15 & 20–22) criticizes the tendency of some feminists to consider women's agency solely within the parameters of resisting patriarchy, failing to recognize that women's agency may also consist of reinscribing and inhabiting patriarchal gender norms. Similarly, Amy Hinterberger (2013, p. 10) criticizes Western feminism for continuing to 'discursively colonize the material and heterogeneities of non-Western women by presenting them as either 'prisoners of patriarchy' or 'dupes of patriarchy'.' My research suggests that the agency of Iraqi women is more complex than this. In some cases, the interviewees endorsed conservative

gender norms as a means of enhancing their security, reflecting that 'Agency works in conjunction with and is formed through the very things we often see as limiting agency, the operation of power' (Amy Hinterberger, 2013, p. 9). Thus, I seek to recognise agency in ways that are sometimes overlooked or discarded, thereby expanding the concept of agency.

Personal security

Personal security, particularly with regards to gender-based violence, has been a central concern of Feminist Security Studies scholars. Examples of gender-based violence, including rape, forced marriage and forced veiling, were raised by the interviewees. In addition, women also spoke about the particular gendered effects of lawlessness and political and criminal violence as well as the gendered impacts of a failing state. Often women's response to this violence was in terms of seeking further protection from patriarchal structures, rather than a rejection of these, or was expressed in terms of nostalgia for Saddam Hussein.

Heba spoke of the particular threats to women after 2003:

After the 2003 war, [...] militias began to infiltrate our society. The Iraqi woman started being raped, kidnapped, and killed. We would walk around and find corpses on the streets. I was 13-years-old and I would see these sights in front of me. Some parents stopped allowing their girls to study out of fear. Should I send my daughter to school and risk her being kidnapped or wait until they take her virginity away [...] If they are looking to imprison her brother or husband and if they can't find either, they would capture the women and rape them. These stories will not be mentioned in the news [...] If a woman leaves prison, whether she was raped or not, you know, as part of Middle Eastern societies, her parents would kill her.

Heba demonstrates that Iraqi women's bodies become a weapon of war in order to intimidate Iraqi men. She also makes the point that women's virginity is highly prized in Iraqi culture; this adds to women's insecurities and the fear of death resulting from any perceived failure to protect this virginity. Other women focused on the rise of Daesh and how it had affected women in particular ways. According to Heba:

Of course [the rise of Daesh affected me]. First of all, we had no freedoms. Women's freedom is in the house. [There were] no jobs. Secondly, we used to be very proud of our Islam but the Islam that they brought us is not Islam. It has degraded women and the Prophet, peace be upon him, never degraded women.

As a result of Daesh, women and children have been forced to flee their homes, but they have not necessarily found security in other parts of Iraq. According to Heba:

We left those districts [controlled by Daesh] by foot [...] Once we reached the nearest city, they told us we're not allowed to enter [...] Why? Am I not part of your honour? [This is said to symbolise the 'honour' of the nation] I am your sister. I am your daughter [...] All of what I have said would never be featured in the media. No one would mention these things [...] Aren't we people, don't we have rights?

Hanady described how Daesh introduced a particular dress code and imposed marriage on unmarried women and girls:

They mostly abused women with forced marriages and made them wear 'boshiya'.⁴ Unmarried women would wear white 'boshiya' and married women would wear black 'boshiya', in order to marry the ones who aren't already. Women and girls have no value.

Nadje Al-Ali and Pratt (2011, p. 35) have also demonstrated how Islamic parties after 2003 imposed the veil as a means of imposing their authority:

Public morality campaigns strongly encourage women to wear the correct "Islamic" clothing, through such instrument as posters illustrating the "proper" and "improper" forms of hijab or modest attire. Militias, many of which are linked to parties in government, are involved in harassment of women on the streets and at checkpoints based on how they are dressed. These paramilitaries have also intimidated and even murdered professional women with impunity.

The issue of increased violence against women in post-2003 Iraq has also been raised by feminist scholars. For example, Nadje Al-Ali and Pratt (2006, p. 5) traces this phenomenon to the lack of police as well as the general rise in political violence:

The insecurity plaguing Iraq has a distinct and debilitating impact on the daily lives of women and girls. Although men make up the majority of the victims of the violence, the climate of fear prevents women from participating in public life.

⁴ Boshiya is a veil that completely covers the face including eyes. It is typically worn with an abaya, which is a type of 'cloak'.

Whilst Al-Ali and Pratt laments the effects of the violence on women's mobility, I found a general acceptance of this restriction as a 'natural' response to gender-specific insecurities. Sameera told me:

Of course there are difficulties facing Iraqi women. Do you think if you were my daughter, I would allow you to leave the house knowing there will be Americans around? No, that's impossible. How can you accept it?

Sameera went on to say:

In Mosul girls are locked up to avoid any contact with Daesh. Equally, they avoided Americans. Americans would stay in Iraq for months without women and you know how they're like; they are used to having sex with women. They have no jealousy. But there are Iraqi women who did have sex with Americans and even married them. My husband forbids me from leaving the house for those very reasons.

Her use of the word 'forbid' suggests masculine force and dominance, but Sameera's tone was approving and she wholeheartedly endorsed her husband's protective zeal. This complicates the debate around the false private and public sphere in Feminist Security Studies. This demonstrates that although the private sphere might be construed as being unsafe and restrictive, women have a different point of view. Sameera not only thinks it is necessary to restrict her mobility, but welcomes these restrictions in order to protect her sexual purity and avoid the possibility of being in a mixed relationship with foreigners.

Some women did question restrictions on their mobility. For example, Christina said: 'I wish we had freedoms, the kind of freedom which enables women to be mobile without requiring a chaperone'. However, she did not reflect on why it is exclusively female and not male bodies that are vulnerable to these restrictions and in need of chaperoning or protection. Instead, it was simply accepted as common sense in a time of insecurity. Only Tala completely rejected restrictions on women:

Freedom, first and foremost, is security for women. They [Iraqi society in general] shouldn't intimidate her or consider that she is a woman to be confined only to domestic and sexual use. Women need freedom to go out and work and have self-confidence. This is what I wish it were like. I am one of these people that feel I'm a leader.

Many women pointed to women's rights and freedoms as indicative of the changes to personal security since 2003. For example, Shayma believed that women had more freedom before 2003:

Life before the [2003] war had its drawbacks, but it nevertheless was a stable and safe period. Women were free to leave the house and dress freely. [...] The Iraqi woman wasn't obliged to wear the hijab; it was a choice. After overturning Saddam's regime, wearing hijab became compulsory. Islamic parties and militias were in control and forced as young as first year primary students to wear the hijab and they even imposed it on non-Muslims.

For Shayma, women's dress and mobility are symbolic of the status of women's security. She does not regard the veil as an inherently oppressive: 'I'm veiled because I'm old. I'm 50 years old'. Rather, she objects to women being forced to wear the veil: 'No one has the right to foist the hijab on young girls who are aged 9 or 10'. Similarly, Shayma points to what she perceives as a rollback in women's legal rights since 2003 as indicative of the threats to women's security. Noga Efrati (2005, p. 557) documents how 'On December 29, 2003, the US-appointed Interim Governing Council (IGC), headed by 'Abdul al-Aziz al-Hakim, the Shi'i cleric who also leads the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), passed Decree 137 to abolish Iraq's Personal Status Law'. Efrati (2005, pp. 594–595) describes how women's rights activists had to fight to preserve a law that was not progressive enough in the first place:

Women's rights activists have been forced to channel energies under chaotic war-time conditions into preserving a law which ignored many of their long-sought demands: outlawing polygamy, equal rights in divorce and inheritance, and further extending maternal child custody. Thus preoccupied, feminists were hindered from advancing personal status issues as they had in the past when regimes perceived as favourable had assumed power. A valuable opportunity was lost. In the 'new Iraq' women have found themselves running just to stay in place.

Throughout Shayma's narrative, she blamed the Iraqi government and US politicians for failing to deliver laws that protect women and expressed nostalgia for the previous regime. That is not to say that laws before 2003 granted gender equality but rather that some women, like Shayma, view legislative changes since 2003 as worsening women's situations. Hanady also expressed nostalgia for life before 2003 on the basis that women had more freedom:

We had [sports] clubs, a woman would go out and drive, she had freedom and she worked. There were a lot of developments in the 70s and beyond. When the [2003] war broke nothing changed but she would be afraid to go out. If she has a job, she would go to work and then straight back home. She needs someone to protect her.

There was more safety in the past. We would be out until 3am or 4am visiting people.

Similarly, Heba contrasts security for women before and after 2003:

Before the war, we at least had a system in place. If someone raped a woman, he would be sent to jail for his acts. When the war broke [...] men would rape women. Some of the rapists are Iraqis but there are men and militias who are not Iraqi, and we don't exactly know where they're from. Who would then stand by her side if there exists no system or safety?

The interviewees were not only concerned about direct violence, but also structural violence caused as a result of Iraq's failing state institutions. For example, Sameera highlighted the gendered impacts of a failing healthcare system:

A big issue facing Iraqi women is a lack of medical support. Pregnant women are left to take care of themselves. They require money to give birth. Preventing them from having intercourse with their husband is not a solution.

As with the issue of community security, women's perceptions of personal insecurity are shaping how they perceive the past. Asra refers to the ousting of Saddam Hussein as 'catastrophic' for Iraqis:

If Saddam Hussein decided to drop a nuclear bomb in Iraq and killed us all it would have been better. To us it was a total destruction to see Americans in our country [...] I wasn't happy about them ousting Saddam. I did not feel that they would bring a better person than him. Saddam was not detrimental to us. Saddam only tortured the ones who misbehaved. Saddam Hussein was a fair man. So if you committed a mistake he would harm you but if you walked on a straight path, he wouldn't touch you [...] If you didn't take the right path you would get what you deserve of course.

Sameera, explained, 'Once you lose a sense of security, your whole life can turn upside down. Of course I will favour Saddam because he offered me security'. As a consequence of Iraq being 'upside down', Samira left Iraq to reside in Jordan. She declared, 'bil rooh, bil dam, afedak ya malik', a patriotic Arabic expression loosely translated as 'I sacrifice my soul and blood (for the King of Jordan)'. There was a time when Sameera felt this kind of pride in being Iraqi, but this feeling has all but disappeared out of despair at the country's deterioration and insecurity. This points to how allegiances and identities can shift based on who can offer the best level of security.

Women were concerned about personal security, which they viewed as deteriorating since 2003 as a result of the US occupation, the rise of armed militias, the rise of Islamist parties, the rise of Daesh, and the break down in law and order. Their narratives highlight not only the gender-specific violence perpetrated against women in conflict but also the gender-specific ways in which general insecurity impacts upon women. In particular, as markers of the collective, whether the Iraqi nation or a religious sub-state group, women have been targeted by different political groups and subject to specific kinds of violence, such as forced veiling and forced marriage. In response, some women have sought not to oppose patriarchal structures but rather to comply with them as a means of securing protection. Meanwhile, others expressed nostalgia for life under Saddam Hussein. In addition, all the women whom I interviewed, who were residing in Amman at the time of our interview, had responded to insecurity by fleeing their homes and their country of birth in order to find increased security for themselves and their families.

Community security

Whilst several women raised the issue of personal security, they were generally more concerned about community security. Experiences and perceptions of community insecurity were narrated in relation to the US invasion and its aftermath, including the rise of sectarianism, persecution of minorities, and the rise of Daesh, as well as erosion of cultural and religious values. These narratives were informed by the intersections of national, religious, ethnic and gender identities.

Sectarianism

Many of the interviewees discussed sectarianism in relation to security. Some interviewees maintain they have always been aware of sectarianism within Iraq, but others regard it as a solely post-invasion phenomenon. They all, however, recognised an increase in sectarian tensions since the US invasion and a corresponding insecurity as a result of this. The nature and extent of the insecurity these women expressed depended largely on their individual ethno-religious background, thereby challenging the notion of a collective Iraqi women's experience.

Some women were vocal in blaming the US invasion for creating sectarianism. Aisha told me: 'the only difficulties women faced [after 2003] were disunity created by Americans. Americans precipitated sectarian tensions between Sunnis and Shias and this triggered terrorism'. Similarly, Shayma blames the US invasion for creating sectarianism:

I'm Sunni, I have a friend who's Shia. Iraqis do not discriminate against different sects. Sectarianism always existed but was suppressed because Iraq had control over its borders and had a strong army. Once Saddam was gone everything fell apart. We Iraqi nationals believe that the basis of a country is its leader. The current members of parliaments don't have any sense of nationalism.

Perhaps because Shayma is a Sunni Muslim, she was less exposed to the trauma of sectarianism under Saddam Hussein and, therefore, she is also more likely to positively identify with an Iraqi national identity, as opposed to a sub-state identity based on sect or ethnicity. Similarly, Sameera, a Sunni Muslim, also remembers Iraq before the US invasion as a harmonious society, telling me: 'growing up, we were conditioned from an early age to accept Saddam Hussein as our father. His picture hung in every single classroom. A national anthem was played daily'. Sameera still refers to Saddam Hussein as 'Baba Saddam' (father Saddam). Her nostalgia for Iraq's past and the vanquished regime inevitably affects her perspective on present day Iraq. For Sameera, the US invasion and the toppling of the old regime brought chaos and insecurity.

Iman also blamed the US invasion for creating sectarianism, comparing the present to the period before 2003:

In the past, Sunnis and Shias were united, they used to be neighbours and eat together [...] You asked me if I am Sunni or Shia, I said I am a Muslim because I don't differentiate, and I was raised to think we are all Muslim. The colonisation brought differences between Sunni and Shia by either Americans or Iraqis. [...] Colonisation could include cultural aims or aims of creating sectarian tensions. Iraq is made of more than one persuasion; there are the Kurds, Turkmen, Sunni, Shia... This issue affected me. We were raised to think that we are Iraqis which means you are Arab and Muslim [...] and not Iraqi from Mosul or Iraqi from Baghdad.

Shatha believed that the only way to resolve sectarian tensions is to have a powerful figure like Saddam Hussein. Her privilege, emanating from a Sunni sect, made her unaware of Saddam's mistreatment of marginalized groups. According to her:

although Saddam was tenacious, he governed Iraq and the Iraqi people [...] He controlled. Iraqi society has several different sects. All these sects have their own ideas and loyalties. [...] Saddam never allowed these discords to surface, so as to eschew sectarianism.

By contrast, she considers that the current Iraqi government as well as the media are to blame for allowing sectarianism to flourish:

The Iraqi government created sectarianism [...] The Arabic media are playing mind games. The news would report that X side of Iraq has bombed X side of Iraq. These kinds of reports fill people's thoughts with sectarianism.

Interestingly, it is not only my Sunni respondents who viewed the era of Saddam Hussein in a more positive light compared with the present. Ruby, a Christian, told me, 'The only thing we liked about Saddam is that he made us live in safety during his time. He did not harm Christians; once Saddam was gone, Christians all left [Iraq]'. Indeed, at the time of our interview Ruby was residing in Amman, waiting to emigrate to Australia to join her husband. Bushra, a Shia woman, who spoke of oppression under Saddam Hussein, also expressed her view that insecurity has magnified rather than reduced since the US invasion:

We used to have one enemy [Saddam] and we knew that he caused havoc. I left Iraq for this very reason. I used to think that once Saddam is eliminated I can return to Iraq. Now Saddam has gone, I still cannot return.

Bushra expressed nostalgia for her home city, Baghdad, prior to the US invasion:

Despite the wars we fought and despite Saddam's control over us, Baghdad still existed as a vibrant city [...] I visited Baghdad after Saddam's downfall, not Baghdad's downfall. I do not like to say it because in my opinion the regime might fall but Baghdad will never fall. As soon as I arrived near the Iraqi borders I started crying all the way home [...] it was disturbing. My children would ask me why are you taking us here? I would reply this is our country and home [...] I wanted to describe them the Iraq I once knew.

Meanwhile, Iraqi women from ethno-religious minorities were less likely to strongly identify with Iraq, past or present, due to longstanding religious intolerance, including under Saddam Hussein. For example, Kawther, who is a Sabaeen woman, told me, 'we were exposed to sectarian tensions. They [other Iraqis] would tell us 'you are infidels and don't have a religion''. She and her husband left their homes and jobs to escape persecution. Similarly, Khadeeja, also a Sabaeen, also spoke about the religious intolerance that she faced growing up before 2003. When Khadeeja performed an ablution for prayer by a river, people would throw stones, 'they would call us infidels, people without a prophet and a book, [that] we needed to convert'. She feels terrorised by her fellow Iraqis:

Even during our school days they tormented us. We weren't allowed to drink water. We weren't allowed to sit on chairs. I had to sit on the floor outside the classroom. In Islamic studies class they would kick us out. They would say "you're Sabaeans, don't sit amongst us". They tried to force us to convert by making us read the Shahada [the Muslim profession of faith]. They would tell us to become Muslim and become part of us.

Khadeeja says simply that, as a persecuted minority, 'life before and after the 2003 Iraq War remains unchanged':

We did not come across good-natured Iraqis. Americans can't speak our language, so we never had any conversations with them to know whether they have good or bad intentions. The terror mostly comes from Iraqis and not Americans.

Kawther, by contrast, does differentiate between the period before and after 2003, asserting that, while 'Saddam's reign, on the one hand used weapons in wars which were hazardous to one's health [...] on the other hand, Saddam offered us security and order which prevented sectarian tensions from arising. Everything fell apart after the 2003 war'.

Several of the interviewees resisted sectarianism without necessarily expressing nostalgia for Saddam Hussein but through narrating their solidarity with women of other sects. Tala, for instance, expressed sympathy for fellow Christian-Iraqis who have been targeted by Daesh:

Yes, it had an impact on me. They have raped women. They would enter their homes and kill them. They are not merciful; you don't feel that they carry mercy in their hearts. They would enter their homes and rape women, especially Christians, these poor people. Just because they are Christian? They are human too. God created them and created us.

Similarly, Shayma told me:

Daesh was formed through exploiting sectarian and ethnic tensions between Sunnis and Shias, Kurds, Yazidi, Christians, Arabs and so forth. Yes, I live in a safe area but I have friends in Mosul and family in Tikrit, the whole of Iraq is one big family. The whole world has become a small village but I consider Iraq our home. I suffer when I see a fellow Iraqi suffer or an Iraqi woman being sold off in markets. How can that not affect me as a woman and as an Iraqi? Even if she's a Yazidi, she's to me my sister, if she's a Christian, she's to me

my sister. I grew up and spent my childhood living amongst Christians in a church despite being a Muslim.

Even whilst complaining about the rise in sectarianism, some women expressed sectarian attitudes themselves, which appear to have emerged as a response to the US invasion. For example, Hanady said:

Saddam had good and bad qualities just like any other leader. He served the interest of Ba'athists. Anyone who spoke against the government or Saddam, would have been killed – him and his family [...] He prevented us from traveling and made us enter battles. There was no mobiles or satellites. People were isolated from the rest of the world. Regardless of all this, he used to cherish Arabs and Iraqis. When he left, Iranians governed us. They dishonoured us. They are loyal to Iran [...] Americans brought them.

Hanady, a Sunni Muslim, clearly identifies with Arabs and Iraqis and seems to allude to the idea that the Iraqi Shia, who have dominated the government since the parliamentary elections of 2005, are not real Iraqis. This point relates to Maria Stern's (2006) argument about the paradox of security. That is, the manners in which desiring security for oneself can produce a negative outcome for others, and how this is often relates to the desire to fix the boundaries of 'who we are':

when people attempt to protect themselves and to create a sense of security, they also produce danger, fear and harm. Furthermore, people seek security in direct relation to who they are – sometimes with devastating consequences. Attempts to secure a notion of 'who we are' invite violence when these notions are not shared by members of the community in question, when 'who we are' must be forcibly instilled through disciplinary tactics, when 'who we are' also depends on belligerently defining and even killing 'who we are not' (Stern, 2006 p. 189).

Sameera, who is also Sunni, expressed feelings of victimization by the Shia by narrating an example of a Sunni woman who was not granted support from a governmental organisation:

They are favouring Shias when Shia make up the majority of the country [...] There's a Sunni woman whose husband was killed because he was an educated Sunni. The woman has his death certificate and proof that her son was killed as well. Yet the UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] has dismissed her story.

Several women identified the gender-specific ways that they were impacted by sectarianism. As ‘markers’ of the collective, women have been singled out in particularly gendered ways. This includes Ruby who as a Christian minority felt increasingly under pressure to comply with a strict Islamic dress code:

I applied to study radiology. I live in Qaraqosh but I had to travel to Mosul to attend classes. This happened around 2007, 2008. I was forced to wear the hijab in order to travel to Mosul. I was on the bus and there were people that got on it and gave us a warning. Any Christian refusing to wear the hijab will be killed. I would wear the veil if I had to go to Mosul and discard it when I am back in my area. Long skirts and shirts are compulsory.

Similarly, Khadeeja, a Sabaeen woman, was also forced to wear the hijab, but this was prior to 2003. She described this as ‘suffocating’. By contrast, Aisha, who wore the ‘niqab’ (full face veil) long before the 2003 invasion, told me that she now prefers to travel to Iraq without the niqab as she fears becoming a target: ‘Sunni women wear a niqab differently from Shias, making me easily identifiable’. This points to how one person’s insecurity can be another person’s security. For instance, one woman felt imprisoned by the veil, while the other felt denied the right to don it, confirming the necessity of understanding context and one’s identity.

Most of the interviewees recognized that sectarianism had increased since 2003, although they did not necessarily agree on the reasons for this. The increase in sectarianism has led to feelings of insecurity. For the most part, this insecurity is not narrated as a direct physical threat but rather as a threat to the Iraqi nation and Iraqi national identity. In some cases, women narrated the gender-specific ways in which they were targeted by sectarianism, particularly those women of religious minorities. Most women lamented the disintegration of a strong Iraqi identity at the expense of a rise in sectarian and ethnic identities. In other words, many of the interviewees narrated security and insecurity in relation to their identification with Iraq and a united Iraqi identity. In several cases, they preferred what they perceived as a strong and stable Iraq under a brutal dictator to a fragmented and insecure Iraq under a freely elected government. For women belonging to religious minorities, the sense of identification with Iraq was not strong as they did not feel that they ever were truly safe in Iraq, whether before or after 2003. In addition, some of my Sunni interviewees experienced the US-led invasion and its aftermath as an attack on the Sunni community and, in response, expressed sectarian attitudes themselves towards other Iraqis. This suggests the ways in which security and identity are mutually constitutive.

The Threat of Daesh

There was a general consensus amongst the interviewees that the rise of Daesh was very negative for Iraq and Iraqis. Some women presented this threat as particularly aimed at their own religious sect. For example, Kawther, a Sabaeen, perceived that non-Muslims are particularly targeted:

The reason why Daesh exists is to create a united Islamic country, I presume [...] the spread of Daesh affected me because according to them I'm an infidel [...] some schools don't allow my daughters to sit next to other students simply for being Sabaeans.

By contrast, Hanady, a Sunni—the same sect as Daesh—regards their principal target as being fellow Sunnis: ‘It’s a game they are playing in order to end Sunnis in Iraq. All the areas they are taking over are Sunni: Mosul, Al-Hawija, Tikrit’. Similarly, Heba believes that Sunnis have been particularly affected by Daesh:

Islamic State first made us feel they were here to protect Sunnis [...] but they killed us [Sunnis] and made us homeless, took our belongings [...] They turned others against us. The Shia would say you are siding with them [Daesh] so we're going to kill you [...] Saudi Arabia did not take up any good position.

Her reference to Saudi Arabia suggests that, as a majority-Sunni country, it should have protected Sunnis from Daesh.

Samantha believed that Christians are more exposed than others: ‘They [Daesh] just appeared in our areas and as Christians we were given three conditions to fulfil. One, to convert to Islam and two, to pay Jizya [a form of tax imposed on non-Muslims]’. Samantha did not mention the third condition. Nevertheless, she does not see the threat from Daesh as merely to Christians: ‘even Muslim areas were subjected to Daesh’s cruelty. Daesh’s presence forced us into exile. It’s the worst war we experienced’. She thus viewed Daesh as, in some manner, a unifying experiential part of being Iraqi that overrides sectarianism. Similarly, Ruby, a Christian, began by speaking of her own ordeal with Daesh:

Daesh directly threatened me while I was at work in my clinic. [...] It used to be safe because it was protected by the Kurds. I examined a woman wearing a niqab who was pregnant. When I was done examining her, she told me: I know there's nothing wrong with me. I am sent by the Islamic State to convey a message. My heart was pounding [...] We are not allowed to refer to them as Daesh. They are called the Islamic State. [She said] I was sent by the Islamic state to demand that you convert. I know your husband is not here

and he travelled to the land of the Kuffar [infidels] and you too are Kaffra [female infidel], if you do not convert, we will take you and your daughters away. And this was not the first time I received this kind of threat [but it was indirect before then]. She was Iraqi and her husband was outside the clinic holding a weapon. I had to say 'Inshallah' [if Allah wills] to her. I was not allowed to say 'okay'. I really just wanted her to leave.

Ruby experienced Daesh's brutal approach first-hand after the Kurds could no longer protect her—notably, the Daesh member threatened to take her daughters away but not her sons or any male family member. She also spoke of the impact of Daesh on Iraqis other than Christians:

My Muslim friend [whom] I told you about. We did not discriminate against each other. She lives in Mosul and told me that she lived in a dire condition. She said, 'they not only forced us to wear the niqab but we always need to be chaperoned. We weren't allowed to go out alone'. She told me about the possibility that as a doctor she would have to perform female genital mutilation. I told her God help you.

Thus, Daesh is viewed as a threat to community security—however, different women defined that community in different ways. Some emphasized the threat to their own religious sect, whilst a few believed that Daesh was a threat to all Iraqis, irrespective of religious sect. Again, this suggests how insecurity and identity are mutually constitutive. 'Securing something requires its identification' (Wibben, 2011, p. 105), but, simultaneously, a feeling of insecurity may work to redefine identity in new ways.

Cultural Erosion

In their narratives, many interviewees expressed a sense of insecurity because of a perception that Iraqi values and traditions, which were often equated with women's roles and behaviours, were being eroded. The reference to women's behaviour is reflective of the almost universal phenomenon that women are considered the symbolic markers of the nation and its cultural and biological reproducers (Yuval-Davis, 2004, p. 170). Many women expressed an opinion—in tension with liberal feminism—that women should uphold 'traditional' Arab or Iraqi values, which were in danger of being lost, in order to preserve Iraq's cultural heritage and identity. In this light, 'traditional' gender norms were constructed as a solution to the fragmentation of and conflict within Iraq.

Iraqi women's security was widely represented as compromised by the transgression of traditional Iraqi values as a result of the post-invasion influx of foreign organisations and personnel, with 'Western attitudes'

imposed artificially. Asra expressed insecurity as a result of what she felt was a cultural invasion by the US:

We became foreign. It was an American occupation. I was foreign in my own country. And we are not use to foreigners in our country. It's like I am not in my country. Their faces are different. That was difficult for us.

Iman feels that the 'openness', or 'Al-infatih' as she refers to it, emanating from the invasion has caused social problems such as pervasive drug use:

The openness muddled the Iraqi woman. They [US] created a gap between their lives before [...] Overnight their lives have changed. [...] Before, the openness, Iraq is the only country in the world that had no drugs and drug use was not pervasive. Currently, I can't say how widespread it is but the openness made it [drug use] more prevalent.

Similarly, Aisha said:

Freedom is out of control in Iraq. Americans brought technology without education. Girls are on Facebook and WhatsApp and it's seen as a negative influence [...] A girl adds one hundred men and wouldn't know whether it is right or wrong to talk to these random men. She might have good intentions while the man doesn't.

Some women expressed the view that women have a unique role as upholders of traditional values and preservers of Iraq's cultural heritage, in resistance to cultural erosion. For example, Kawther declared that a woman's rights and privileges 'need to all fall within the boundaries of moral values which Arabs are known for doing'. Some Iraqi women constructed 'traditions' with reference to religion. For example, Asra believed that women's role must not exceed the boundaries of Islamic practice and tradition, 'Personally, freedom for me and my daughters [...] I don't restrict them but it needs to be within the boundaries of Islamic practice and traditions'. In this way, Iraqi women narrate community insecurity in relation to changing gender relations and thereby view the solution as a need for women to 'return' to 'traditional' values, by limiting their freedom. This highlights the paradoxical relationship between victimhood and agency, when viewed within a liberal feminist framework. However, not all women endorsed 'traditional' gender norms. Dalal believed that 'freedom is limitless', implicitly unbound by any traditions, desiring 'freedom of expression, in order for women to express their inner thoughts and feelings. Domestic freedom and work. Everything really'.

Not all Iraqi women narrated cultural erosion in terms of gender roles but as a general deterioration in the human capital of Iraq. For example, some women emphasized the declining educational standards. Shayma argued that prior to the 2003 invasion, 'we had laws in place which ensured that children attended school. If a child were truant from school then his/her parents would be held accountable. This is not the case anymore'. Kawther similarly explained that 'the level of education has dropped and children do not attend school'. Meanwhile, according to Abeer:

Iraqi men and women are in a state of limbo. It [the war] brought life to a halt. There's no country or women for us to feel that we are advancing. Our universities are not able to compete on a world stage. Everyone is suffering except for politicians.

On the other hand, Sameera complained that the US is taking over their food heritage: 'we can't even go to restaurants as you'll find them [Americans] there. They [Americans] took everything from us, even our food'. Sameera's comment on food reveals how she feels about the occupation. American presence in restaurants is a symbol of the American occupation itself as being ubiquitous. In contrast, most reports on the situation in Iraq after 2003 have focused on highlighting that the cost of food has increased, with an implication towards security. Sameera did not narrate food in relation to hunger or poverty, but rather discussed it in relation to community security and how Iraqi restaurants should be protected from Americans taking over Iraqi cultural life.

On a slightly different note, Hanady was concerned with the destruction of Iraq's physical heritage: 'There is nothing left, even cultural sites were destroyed by Daesh. Museums are ransacked. Anything symbolic to Iraq is taken down. They [Daesh] want us to restart everything without a history or origin'. The loss of Iraq's cultural sites, despite the fact that these sites are thousands of years old and were not built by the modern Iraqi state, nonetheless points to the significance of the appropriation of ancient history in nation building in terms of creating a unifying identity that bridges different sects. Eric Davis (2005, p. 111) highlights how the Ba'ath party attempted to rewrite Iraq's history to create a single Iraqi identity which suppressed all other Iraqi identities:

Through an emphasis on Iraq's pre-Arab and pre-Islamic heritage- which was symbolized by the choice of the Akkadian sun for the revolution's flag and the use of ancient Mesopotamian designs for its symbol – the July 1958 Revolution eschewed the symbols of Pan-Arabism such as the red, green, and black tricolour with its eagle insignia. The twin motifs of folklore and ancient Mesopotamian heritage served as counterweights to Pan-Arabists designs by underlining Iraq's position as the 'cradle of civilization: which

obviously preceded Arab sematic civilization. Further, folklore served to bridge the ethnic gap between Sunni and Shi'i Arabs and Kurds because it emphasized their cultural commonalities, such as food, rituals, sports and other leisure activities, rather than differences.

Perceptions of communal insecurity were expressed in relation to the failure of the Iraqi state to provide security and the growth of non-state armed actors, principal amongst them being Daesh; the disintegration of a unified Iraqi identity; the primacy of ethno-religious identities; and the dilution of traditional values and culture. For the most part, women have responded to these communal insecurities by identifying with their sub-state identity, usually defined by religious sect, or through nostalgia for Saddam Hussein. It appears that there is no longer a unified Iraqi identity that may overcome sectarian cleavages, although several women expressed compassion for and empathy with other Iraqis who have been particularly targeted by Daesh. In addition, and in contrast to much of the feminist literature, several women viewed increasing freedoms for women as *contributing to* communal insecurity; they called for more limits on women's freedoms as necessary not only for women's personal security but for protecting national traditions and religious values.

Economic security

Many of the interviewees perceived that women in Iraq are economically insecure. Some women even prioritized the need for economic security. For example, Shayma asserted that 'to be free, first and foremost, is to be safe, financially stable and to work'. Similarly, Dalal considers economic security in tandem with security more broadly:

At this moment the Iraqi woman's situation is deteriorating. In terms of security, I give it a rating of zero. There's a sense of fear and terror. There's no work, no freedom, no nothing.

However, they viewed the implications of economic insecurity in different ways. In general, there was a different perception towards the economic insecurity of other women from low-income backgrounds versus the self-experiences of economic insecurity amongst middle-class interviewees. In other words, class differences prevented the narrating of a unified Iraqi women's experience with regards to economic security.

A symbol of economic insecurity in Iraq and its particular gendered effects is the 'Iraqi widow': that is, Iraqi women whose husbands were killed during the US-led invasion and its aftermath. It is estimated there are over one million of these war widows (Al-Ali, 2010, p. 72). In her book on the Iraq War, Cynthia Enloe (2010, p. 63) described the hardship widows go

through, arguing, ‘Wartime widows simultaneously must navigate their country’s sexist inheritance laws, the bureaucratic red tape, and the not-always-altruistic relatives’. While none of the interviewees were widows themselves, several expressed concern for widows and accused the government and international organisations of failing to protect these women. Shayma discussed the issue of widows extensively in order to demonstrate how their situation is deteriorating. She believes they are subject to greater suffering and insecurity than other women:

There are 20,000 widows and divorcees out of work in my district alone. Widows receive 50,000 ID [Iraqi Dinar] [42.75 US Dollars at the time of the interview in April 2015] in monthly allowance and each child receives 40,000 ID [34.20 US Dollars at the time of the interview in April 2015] from the government. This adds up to approximately \$200 for women with three children [sic!].

The situations of Iraqi widows as well as other women from low-income backgrounds were discussed not only out of empathy for their plight but also as symbols of the plight of Iraq itself. For example, Sameera told me, ‘There are so many widows and orphans and the numbers are on the rise. UNHCR are cutting down Iraqis’ allowances and are transferring it over to Syrians’. Meanwhile, Shayma was concerned about how, out of poverty, such women were forced to send their children out to work and also to marry off their young daughters: ‘our country has more child marriages than Saudi Arabia and Yemen’. The negative comparison with Saudi Arabia and Yemen, considered more socially conservative countries, functions to highlight how Iraq is regressing.

Similarly, Iman discussed increasing economic vulnerability for poor women since 2003 in order to highlight how bad things have become in Iraq in general:

Before the invasion, there was safety. There are things that were available to [women]. Yes, they [women] had no income but you could find Iraqi products. You would not find poverty. Anyone who was very poor would receive food staples: rice, sugar and flour, all the basic food items. [...] Now you can’t find food banks, it’s not available everywhere.

Some women discussed the ways in which gender discrimination was preventing women from getting good jobs. For example, Shayma told me: ‘please focus on this point Ms. Bidrea, a female civil engineer is refused employment because she’s female’. She also stated that, what employment was available is predominantly in the defence and security sectors, which preferred to hire men: ‘There aren’t any projects which would help foster

women's development'. Ebtihal also perceived that women are discriminated against:

The challenge women face is with employment. [Employers] don't employ them and a lot of graduates are staying at home. If there are any vacancies you have to pay for them \$700, \$800 to get hired. Not every family can afford to pay it.

She also highlights the intersection of gender and class and the extent to which class inequality in Iraq increases a woman's economic insecurities. Hanady also stressed the economic situation affected women differently depending on their class background:

My sister and her daughters are still in Iraq and they are able to go to work and university and their social life has not changed. But there are ones who were affected financially; they are the ones who are regressing. They do not have money to study or put their children in school.

However, whilst the economic situation of women from poorer backgrounds was discussed predominantly in relation to their ability to carry out their social reproduction roles, middle-class women interviewees discussed their own economic situation predominantly in relation to their class status. Tala told me:

My life changed [after the 2003 war] in terms of finances. It exhausted us psychologically and caused an impact on my children. Anything they desire I can't provide. I wish I could work but my husband won't allow me. The jobs that have been offered to me don't match my level. A thing like being a hostess in funerals is a job similar to that of maids. He would not allow it. He says this is not your level. If I were offered an office job, he would allow it. I desire to work. If I had money I would create a business.

In attempting to maintain their middle-class status, Tala's husband prevents her from taking what is perceived to be an inferior job. Although Tala wishes to work, she does not criticize her husband, suggesting that she, too, values the maintenance of class status. Similarly, Ruby, who was a radiologist from a wealthy background, connects the loss of her job with a loss of status:

I was an employed doctor and I used to receive an income [...] I had two houses, one of which I worked on for 10 years. It was a villa. A house with 8 rooms. Guests would be impressed by it [...] Now it's gone.

Whilst, historically, education has been a route to upward social mobility, since 2003, this is no longer the case, as Ebtihal's remarks demonstrate:

I completed a doctorate to improve my children's life conditions but after 2003 [...] I studied for 35 years and I did not benefit from my qualifications. I have a son who's an engineer who can't find employment and another son who's a police officer who is also without a job. My daughter migrated to Sweden and my son to America. My family is disunited.

Moreover, Ebtihal was also forced to flee the wealthy neighbourhood in which she lived because of the sectarian violence that erupted after 2006:

The biggest difficulty I faced was to move from my area, Al-Adhamiyah, which was a pleasant and predominantly Sunni area, to a wholly Shia area, because my sons have Shia names, Omar, Ali and Mohammed, and it was safer for them to stay in a Shia area.

It is understood here that the predominantly Shia neighbourhood was not as pleasant because it was poorer.

Hanady also expressed a loss of status in relation to the war and violence in Iraq since 2003. She believes this has had a levelling effect in that Iraqis of all social classes were forced to flee, and she is rather contemptuous of this blurring of class hierarchies:

The crisis caused Iraqis from different backgrounds to flee, the educated and the uneducated. Iraqis who have sought refuge in America, we call them Arab but they are not on our level, so of course we have a negative view of them. There are different divisions in societies. The ones who are like me are very different to the ones who go to America. The more sophisticated people prefer Jordan, England or Canada. But Americans are taking in the common people. I am not sure if they are deliberately doing this.

However, other Iraqi women that I interviewed were more sympathetic towards less fortunate Iraqis. Several women who I interviewed who were from wealthier backgrounds were actively involved in charitable activities, such as raising money, to support Iraqi refugees in Jordan—many of whom find themselves in extremely precarious situations as discussed in previous chapters.

The interviewees highlighted the significance of class in differentiating women's perceptions of and experiences of economic insecurity. Feminist Security Studies literature often emphasizes the particularly gendered ways in which women are impacted by violence and conflict, particularly the

increased burden on their social reproductive roles. Women perceived economic insecurity as a threat to the social reproductive roles of poorer, less fortunate women, but not necessarily themselves. With regards to their own experiences of economic insecurity, this was mostly expressed in terms of a loss of status. Women responded to this loss of status in different ways. We can understand comments that are contemptuous towards Iraqis from poorer backgrounds as one way of maintaining class privilege. A contrasting way of maintaining class privilege is through involvement in charity work to support the less fortunate.

Conclusion

The advantages of a feminist standpoint approach to understanding women's concept of security

The concept of human security often universalizes the meaning of security. A feminist standpoint epistemology together with a narrative approach has helped guard against this essentialization by empowering the individual to conceptualize their own meaning of security. Whilst all the interviewees desired security, each individual woman professed a different understanding of what constituted security.

These findings highlight how prioritizing women's voices by adopting a feminist standpoint theory approach can create new meaning which counters hegemonic knowledge about Iraqi women in order to contribute to the project's main question: *how have Iraqi women disrupted US dominant knowledge of Muslim women since 9/11?* It is perhaps unsurprising that in inviting Iraqi women to narrate their own identities and experiences I found that security was a predominant, unifying concern. In a country rife with war, these women all portrayed a desire for stability and security. There is a common feeling among Iraqi women that the country's instability has eradicated class hierarchies, led to a recurrence of restrictive gender roles, and diluted any nationalist collective agenda. Consequently, many individual women related their own personal identity to these broader issues, although each Iraqi woman has been affected by factors of nationality, class and gender differently, which makes their individual experiences unique.

I have addressed the subsidiary question: *How do narratives of Iraqi women reveal the relationship between security and identity?* I approached the question by adopting a narrative approach, thus I was able to highlight Iraqi women's self-identities and how these diverged from US assumptions that the fostering of women's agency through initiatives for democracy is synonymous with security. Iraqi women instead seek security by identifying with collective, often sectarian, identities which may in turn perpetuate

rather than diminish the insecurities confronting Iraqi women. This does not indicate a lack of agency however; Iraqi women express agency through more nuanced and complicated positions than US narratives and indeed many scholars have allowed.

This chapter deployed intersectionality in order to take into account their multivalent identities in relation to security and revealed that Iraqi women's self-identities are constitutive of and constituted in relations to their perceptions of security. A standpoint approach helps us to pay attention to how women position themselves not only in terms of gender, but also in terms of class, religion, and ethnic background. Focusing on a single social marker—be it race, ethnicity or gender—leads to an impoverished understanding of security. This is because Iraqi women's narratives suggest not only the importance of security at an individual and collective level, but also the ways in which gender intersects with other vectors of identity to produce different insecurities. This challenge any prioritization of gender in understanding women's insecurity as well as any direct causal relationship between particular elements of identity and security.

Thus, studying women's perceptions of security using a narrative approach and intersectionality illuminated the different ways that women construct their identities in relation to different types of insecurity. For example, studying women's economic insecurity also illuminated how the gap between the needs of women from middle class backgrounds and working-class backgrounds is vast. Middle class women were concerned with establishing a high standard of living for themselves personally; this was often as important as the struggle to survive. The divide between low income and middle-class women points to the importance of contextualization.

The relationship between agency, identity and security

My findings extend the work of Maria Stern (2004) Annick Wibben (2011) on the link between agency and security. The interviewees constructed particular types of identities in relation to security threats. Many Iraqi women narrated shared Arab or Islamic values in order to counter foreign influences and instabilities. My findings highlight that identity and insecurity are mutually constitutive. I argue that communal security is indivisible from personal security. For example, ethno-religious minorities were less likely to feel nationalistic pride due to longstanding intolerance. Christians generally maintained a positive view of Saddam Hussein for providing security, because the Christian community felt safe under Saddam Hussein. With that Christian community now under threat and increasingly emigrating, their loyalty to Iraq has diminished. Iraqi Christians are instead often seeking solidarity with their co-religionists abroad. For Sabaeans, sectarian tensions are the norm in Iraq rather than a new phenomenon, and

feelings of alienation continue to exist. Therefore, they see no viable option but to emigrate. The aftermath of the invasion has especially heightened differences between Sunnis and Shias. Some Sunnis felt under threat from Shias and implicitly blamed foreign forces such as Daesh and Iran for supporting Shias to plot against wiping out Sunnis in Iraq. Shias, however, felt ostracised and are more likely to root their identity in an area other than Iraq, signalling their sense of marginalization.

My study also reveals how some Iraqi women were shaped by their nostalgia. Romanticising the past has in some cases been a natural response to the insecurity and instability of the present. Sunni women were more likely to feel nostalgic nationalism because Saddam Hussein traditionally favoured them; they associate the emancipation of Iraqi women with the bygone regime. Minority groups who are often impoverished, however, are less likely to feel nostalgic. Generally speaking, most Iraqi women—even the ones who have acknowledged Saddam Hussein's atrocities—look back at his rule with positivity, because they measure stability and peace by the level of security he provided. The predominant trend to nostalgia is an implicit condemnation of all that followed.

The sense of divergent collectives with different understandings of nationalism and its insecurities is reflected in different proposed solutions. Some Sunnis maintain that to resolve sectarian tensions a powerful leader like Saddam Hussein, an autocrat who will not allow sectarian tensions to surface, is required. These sectarian tensions and opposing collectives have in some senses fragmented Iraqis into insulate sub-groups which self-support rather than rely on, or trust, the state. A suspicion of the nationalist project was strikingly pervasive across the interviewees.

My findings also challenged the feminist idea that all women desire freedom from patriarchy. For many of the interviewees, the freedoms they sought were negotiated within the securities of patriarchy. At points, some Iraqi women narrated instances of opposing gender norms in pursuit of freedom, but at other points they desired to protect the very traditions that restrict women's freedoms. As women, they believed they had an obligation to preserve Iraqi tradition and pass down their values onto the next generation. As a result, they found it necessary to give up some of their freedoms in order to maintain social order. The Iraqi women I interviewed were in the main fully cognisant of such principles; within their situation however, agency was expressed by creating security for oneself rather than adhering to abstract principles or defying normative behaviour.

My findings also highlight the need to consider studying class in relation to security. Iraqi women have expressed their class identity by narrating issues of economic insecurity. Middle class women have expressed insecurities about losing their social status due to the conflict. Awareness of class

division has helped mobilize middle class women in aiding less fortunate Iraqi women through charitable means. This often comes as a way of expressing their class status and feeling empowered. These findings suggest that the gap between working class women's and middle-class women's insecurities has prevented them from narrating a shared experience. Recently, there has been little research in Feminist Security Studies which has explored how class differences shape women's experiences of post conflict differently.

I have closely studied the link between security and agency, and in my thesis's conclusion, I will compare the agencies of Iraqi women in both these substantive chapters and where we need to go from there.

Conclusion: Reflections and Recommendations

My ambitions are not to speak for [...] women or to generalize from the discourses of in/security-identity, but to pose questions around in/security identity from reading their narratives as valid texts of global politics (Stern, 2005, p. 56).

The thesis has heeded Stern's advice by adopting standpoint theory as its epistemological underpinning to highlight Iraqi women's experiences as knowledge of International Politics. The present work included carrying out in-depth empirical research with Iraqi women in order to generate an original dataset of interviews. The aim of these interviews was to capture women's positionalities in relation to US foreign policy narratives and their experiences of insecurity after the US-led invasion of Iraq. To that end, I deployed the method of narrative analysis and a feminist and postcolonial theoretical framework to produce alternative knowledge.

The core argument advanced by my thesis is that a feminist standpoint theory approach enables us to understand women's narratives as a source of alternative knowledge production, which, in turn, can challenge the binary and essentializing assumptions underpinning dominant knowledge about marginalized women, in this project's case, Iraqi women. This core argument challenges the frameworks of postcolonial feminist theorists working on the representation of Muslim women since 9/11 who have tended to focus more on studying hegemonic knowledge. It also extends the work of Feminist Security Studies scholars researching women in conflict or marginalized women by highlighting the importance of an intersectionality.

Existing studies of US representations of Muslim women since 9/11 have almost entirely excluded the positionalities and responses of the women in question; those studies that do include these responses virtually never do so in any meaningfully systematic fashion, or they reduce their positionalities to an entirely oppositional stance. The diverse experiences of these women have thus gone unacknowledged in the literature, leaving Iraqi women's narratives unheard, their agencies misunderstood, and continuing the propagation of essentializing binaries. This has led in some cases to a serious limitation of knowledge about their experiences and agency.

Moreover, existing studies that examine Iraqi women's situation in Iraq lack theorization of their security situation. Feminist Security Studies scholars who are concerned with questions of security have mostly focused on gendered violence and thus lack nuance on the many types of violence that could be manifested in a woman's experience of (post-) conflict. In all cases, studies dealing with Iraqi women in conflict situations have rarely considered women's agency in relation to their experiences of conflict; this

leaves us with an impoverished understanding of Iraqi women's lived experiences.

The present project has extended postcolonial feminist studies of women's agency in representation studies by emphasizing the importance of highlighting women's positionalities in relation to hegemonic knowledge about them, in order to highlight their agency and destabilise Orientalist binary oppositions. I have also extended Feminist Security Studies by taking a more intersectional approach to security, in order to correct the tendency of merely focusing on gendered analysis of violence and discounting cultural context. Understanding women's agency through examining Iraqi women's intersectional identity in relation to their insecurities has facilitated this project's aims to develop the concept of security.

The following section will discuss my research findings in relation to my research questions. I first discuss the findings of Chapter Three, examining the positionalities of Iraqi women towards US narratives about women in Iraq and the Middle East since 9/11, particularly highlighting the concept of agency and power relations. I then discuss my findings of Iraqi women's experiences of (post-) conflict. I will also discuss the wider implication of these findings to the fields of Feminist IR, IR, Security Studies and Feminist Security Studies. Lastly, I offer concluding remarks for possible directions that future studies can take. With respect to this, I focus on issues of identity, agency and security of women in (post-) conflict situations.

Re-conceptualizing agency in relation to positionality

This thesis has demonstrated that in order to fully understand representations of Muslim women, we must incorporate the voices of the women in question and engage more with the act of listening to their voices, as advocated by Spivak (1988). This is a core postcolonial feminist tenant, yet it has been largely ignored in the postcolonial feminist literature dealing with the representation of Muslim women since 9/11. Drawing on a feminist standpoint epistemology, this research sought to bridge this gap by foregrounding the narratives of Iraqi women and treating these as sources of alternative knowledge. These findings have also complicated power relations between Iraqi women's knowledge production and US hegemonic knowledge. This thesis has made a number of contributions in relation to agency and knowledge production. Notably, my project has moved away from binaries and complicated the idea of agency. I have also illustrated how the prioritization of alternative knowledge has led to understanding power relations in complex ways. More specifically, I have built on the works of Gayatri Spivak (1988) regarding listening to subaltern women's voices, Stuart Hall (1973) on encoding/decoding, Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) on intersectionality, and Fernando Coronil (1996) on Occidentalism. This has allowed me to develop a systematic approach to highlighting

alternative knowledge as a way of challenging dominant knowledge—this has resulted in generative, unexpected new findings.

This thesis has argued that studying Iraqi women's positionalities in relation to US narratives about them has revealed a complex relationship that supports as well as contests elements of their representation. Scholars in the mainstream have strongly endorsed Muslim women who oppose US narratives, arguing that US narratives have victimized them. I have countered this simplistic proposition by re-conceptualizing their agencies. In addition, I have drawn out theoretical points based on empirical research, rather than from abstraction, and thus have avoided predetermining women's agencies.

The call for complicating the concept of agency in relation to positionality may not be wholly welcomed by postcolonial feminist scholars who have traditionally considered agency to reside solely in oppositional positions. This is because many feminist scholars assume the oppositional is a stronger stance than others and the only one worth recognizing, if agency is to be effective in challenging Western narratives. My project has shown that taking this approach leads to bias and essentialization of women's positionalities and experiences. For example, scholars such as Lila Abu Lughod (2002) and others have argued that 'Muslim women do not need saving', in order to make the claim that Muslim women resist US superiority and reject hegemonic representations of themselves. This is an inherently sweeping generalization based on assumptions that all Muslim women hold an oppositional stance. Thus, there is an implicit underlying assumption that an oppositional stance is the only authentic voice. This is a false premise, and scholars may have determined the authenticity of women's position based on aligning it with their own anti-colonial stance. Further, scholars tend to attribute the idea of conforming to hegemonic position to soft power, dupes or puppets, not recognizing that such positions may be based on complex experiences. This can be regarded as an act of homogenization. For example, Spivak (1990, p. 56, *my emphasis*) once said: 'This is a white position [or this is a Muslim woman position], again you are homogenizing. I think there is safety in specificity rather than in those labels'. The problem with homogenizing Muslim women's voices is that an 'us versus them' binary perpetuates stereotypes and precludes individuals from exercising agency.

These scholars' narrow definition of agency suggests a reliance on methods that do not make possible a multiplicity of perspectives. It recognizes only certain behaviours and has overlooked the core feminist postcolonial tenets of 'listening to' and 'speaking to' women. Instead, if we are open to the idea of not creating boundaries around the idea of authenticity, we can begin to become more *inclusive* to diverse ideas of agency. While Sneja Gunew (1990, p. 56) gives the example of how hegemonic voices construct an

authentic voice of the migrant experience, this point also holds true for scholars who approach the representation of marginalized women by amplifying a single voice or an authentic voice:

the whole notion of authenticity, of the authentic migrant experience, is one that comes to us constructed by hegemonic voices; and so, what one has to tease out is what is not there. One way of doing this (if one has knowledge from a particular culture), is to say: But look, this is what is left out, this is what is covered over; this kind of construction is taking place, this kind of reading is being privileged or, these series of readings are being privileged; and then to ask, What readings are not privileged, what is not there, what questions can't be asked?

In order to ask these kinds of questions, one must revise one's methodological approach in a way that allows for pluralistic meanings to surface. Thus, if one is to effectively challenge binaries such as 'us and them', one must adopt a methodological approach that helps prioritize socially situated knowledge in order to capture a range of voices.

Thus, my findings have demonstrated that reality is far more complicated than a simple narrative that most Muslim women resist US narratives and foreign policy. My findings have shown that individual women negotiated multiple positions depending on the issue. What does this mean? Women's decoded positionalities demonstrate a wide spectrum of agency in relation to dominant power relations. Understanding their pluralistic positionalities has ultimately debunked the idea of a unifying singular 'Iraqi women' collective. Collectively, these interviews are illustrative of the degree to which highlighting individual narratives and the particularities of each women's situation has undermined a collective Iraqi identity, let alone an Iraqi 'sisterhood'. I thus argue that there is a need to recognize personal circumstances and to resist categorizing women. Such a homogenization diminishes their pluralistic agency and perpetuates the myth of solidarity. The idea that the concept of solidarity or sisterhood is a myth might surprise and even be rejected by some scholars who assume that marginalized women would unanimously resist hegemonic knowledge about themselves. I have argued that such an approach ignores the idea that agency is wide ranging.

Furthermore, my findings have demonstrated that it is essential to highlight Iraqi women's negotiated positions for a multiplicity of reasons. Highlighting these negotiated positions has allowed me to identify the discrepancies between, and ambiguities within, Iraqi women's narratives. These narratives have helped to destabilize meaning and break down binaries, as a negotiated position neither wholly agrees with a particular US

narrative nor wholly disagrees with it. Their negotiated positions have identified cracks in both hegemonic and oppositional positions and capture fluidity in meaning. This has created an in between space which allows for new meanings to arise.

Further, highlighting the abstention position has amplified my goal of capturing pluralistic accounts of women's experiences. I have argued that abstaining from responding to a question is a position in and of itself—if an individual decides not to take a position, this necessarily involves a motive for doing so. Abstention in the case of the interviewees may connect to the fear of talking about Others, because they felt more comfortable discussing their own situation. My findings have shown that women from minority backgrounds often adopt this position because they wish to remain apolitical with regards to highly politicised topics. In my research, I have also demonstrated that the abstention position can be regarded as a form of agency. I have argued that my findings extend Lene Hansen's theory of 'security as silence', as I have shown that an abstention position can be a tool for resistance to a perceived threat.

These observations have led us to the crucial question: *what does studying Iraqi women's positionalities tell us about the relationship between power relations and knowledge production?* By adopting Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory and deploying Occidentalism as a supplemental theory, I have demonstrated that even a hegemonic position is an agential position and not a passive acceptance of hegemonic narratives. I have argued that treating decoding positionalities as an Occidental response challenges Said's Orientalism, which perceives the relationship between East and West in binary terms.

Thus, Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory has been employed to help demonstrate that US hegemonic knowledge can be interpreted in a number of ways. This in turn has shown that US hegemonic power does not determine how individuals understand US narratives. Individuals may alter these narratives in a way that empowers them and amplifies their own stances. This includes adopting a hegemonic stance, which they often highlighted to embellish their identity as positive and progressive. In this respect, my project has contributed to the dismantling of the binary of powerful v powerless. Studying women's positionalities therefore complicates the way in which we view hegemonic knowledge not as a one-way power relation.

Perhaps the most surprising finding in this work is that women were largely unaware of US representations of themselves, nor were they particularly concerned about them. Nearly all of the interviewees did not wish to spend substantial time discussing representations of themselves. Instead, security was what mattered to them.

The implications of studying narratives of identity and security

Following on from the alternative knowledge approach to understanding women's agency, this thesis has also considered Iraqi women's narratives of their experiences of war, conflict, violence and displacement since 2003 in relation to their identities.

My study has drawn on theories of human security and Feminist Security Studies to demonstrate there is a need for conceptualising the notion of security with a more intersectional narrative approach, in order to study the relationship between women's identities and security. By taking an intersectional narrative security approach, I have been able to highlight the meaning of security for these women and the differences amongst women in terms of perceptions of insecurity. I have demonstrated that their narratives operated on a very different basis from those of US politicians.

My research has revealed three main security areas which Iraqi women have highlighted, these are: personal security, community security and economic security. I shall discuss the general trends and the implications for how we understand the relationship between identity and security for Feminist Security Studies, Security Studies, Feminist IR, and IR in general.

Regarding the interviewees' personal security, they viewed it as declining since 2003 due to the US occupation, as well as the rise of paramilitaries, Islamist parties, Daesh, and the break down in law and order. The interviewees' narratives highlighted the different types of gendered-based violence such as forced veiling, forced marriage rape, and restriction on mobility which had their own cultural particularities. These could not be fully understood if we were to examine this merely by deploying a gendered analysis. For example, Sameera, one of my interviewees, discussed how Americans desired to have sexual relationships with Iraqi women. Sameera explained that she wholeheartedly accepted her husband's decision to exercise his dominance in preventing her from leaving the house, so as to avoid contact with Americans. This finding demonstrates that, without understanding women's cultural specificity, we risk wrongly assuming that such restrictions on mobility cause her insecurity. The reality is that Sameera views this as providing her with security.

Iraqi women I interviewed were generally more concerned about community security than personal security. These narratives were informed by the intersections of national, religious, ethnic and gender identities. Iraqi women were affected by the rise of sectarianism, and most Iraqi women narrated community security not as a direct physical threat of sectarianism but as loss of identity. For example, some women mourned the loss of Saddam Hussein, who they perceived to be an effective community leader

that provided them with a sense of community security—this is true for Sunni women especially as he protected Sunnis under his reign. With this protection gone, Sunnis have expressed some sectarian tensions towards other groups. However, the vast majority of minorities I interviewed did not share this view. This finding confirmed Maria Stern's argument about the paradox of security, and more specifically about securing identity and how a notion of 'who we are' invites violence when these notions are not shared by members of other communities.

Some women discussed the erosion of cultural sites, or public spaces, as a loss of national identity. It is best to understand national identity as:

a relational term whose identity derives from its inherence in a system of differences. In the same way that 'man and woman' define themselves reciprocally (though never symmetrically) national identity is determined not on the basis of its own intrinsic properties, but as a function of what it (presumably) is not. Implying 'some element of alterity for its definition' a nation is ineluctably shaped by what it opposes (Peterson, 1992, p. 5).

Thus, highlighting nationality and sectarianism in this way is a prompt for how we reflect on women's insecurities. For instance, the interviewees frequently narrated a sense of a collective identity informed not by gender, but by sect and/or religion; women were united not with all other women, but with other women from the same ethnic or religious group. This again was underscored by concerns of security. Collective identities that encouraged mutual support generated a sense of security, as well as empowerment, but these formed along sectarian lines, because insecurities tended to reflect and stem from such divisions. Intersectionality thus opened up the narratives of Iraqi women to reveal multiple influences and to broaden the representations available to them.

My findings have also demonstrated that economic insecurity has affected women from middle classes differently to women who come from impoverished backgrounds. However, middle class women highlighted poorer women's economic insecurities. One example of a narrative that middle class women highlighted is the issue of mothers who were forced to send their children to work or marry them young, as they were too poor to look after them.

The way in which middle class women perceive their own economic insecurities is linked to the insecurity of the loss of class status. Often preserving social positioning was an underlying concern for women who discussed economic insecurities. Several Iraqi women expressed an obligation to support less privileged or more unfortunate women, highlighting an awareness of differences in class and status. Middle class

women narrated how they have helped women, which they sometimes did as a way to maintain their own class identity. This also reiterates a sense of independence from US aid—Iraqi women are often mutually supportive. There is evidence of favouritism when it comes to providing aid, however. Muslims largely support Muslims and Christians only reach out to other Christians. Sabaeans, however, do not have that network of support to fall back on due to their few numbers. This has prevented Iraqi women from identifying a unifying narrative. My study shows that studying economic security can be an illuminating way of understanding women's experiences and class backgrounds. The theme of economic security in relation to women's experiences in a (post-) conflict context is underappreciated in Feminist Security Studies.

These findings about personal, economic, and communal security confirms Maria Stern's argument that identity and security are mutually constitutive, as who women say they are, shapes their insecurities. I also extend Stern's study by considering the relationship between identity and security in a different context than her study.

The particular context of women's experiences of the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq has complicated the idea of identity in relation to security in a number of ways. I have demonstrated that many view communal security as indivisible from personal security, and middle-class women's concerns differed greatly from working class women in the context of post-conflict experiences.

My project shows that more studies need to consider incorporating class analysis for a richer understanding of social complexities within the context of a post-conflict experience. Moreover, a study which considers questions of class without regarding cultural context leads to impoverished knowledge. I argue that it is vital to adopt an intersectional approach which is mindful of a 'different kind of differences', as advocated by Yuval Davis (2006) and Harding (1997). I agree with their argument that ignoring women's cultural context when studying social differences will lead to partial knowledge and risks homogenizing women's experiences.

Re-conceptualizing agency in relation to security

My project has also contributed to the idea of complicating agency in relation to security. For example, I have found that Iraqi women felt secure in their traditional and very restrictive gender roles. Many Iraqi women advocated the importance of maintaining traditional values and upholding patriarchal structures, as they evoked or enforced security. They were not interested in seeking liberty from patriarchy. This runs contrary to mainstream feminist scholarship and is therefore overlooked in much of the literature. Feminist scholars' understanding of agency advocates that it must

only seek freedom from patriarchy. Scholars might perceive women who allow their husbands to restrict their mobility as a type of domestic violence, but such reading is a Western interpretation of another culture. We can better interpret women's narratives in relation to context, if gender is not the only prism in which we analyse narratives and other social markers are given the same level of commitment in understanding one's experience. The interviewees consistently found patriarchy to be useful in times of conflict. They sought protection and accepted chaperoning, and some even found it necessary to curtail their mobility for the sake of security and comfort. We must recognise that these Iraqi women have willingly accepted, even demanded, these impositions in order to pursue security. In the light of this, these decisions should be treated as agential and encourage the recognition of this agency.

Another finding that my project has highlighted is how Iraqi women chose to exercise their agency in relation to nostalgia and memory. Many women recalled more secure times, such as under Saddam Hussein, and equated this with contentment. They perceived nostalgia as a tool for bringing a sense of security and comfort. Memory has served as a powerful tool for reshaping their past and future in order to cope with the loss of communal identity. This calls for more research into the study of memory and nostalgia as a form of security. Thus, I have extended the work of Wibben and Sterns by making the ways in which we think about agency more nuanced and by arguing for the need to take into account more contextual analysis. This is in order to more comprehensively understand the way in which we approach agency in relation to security.

Wider implications and future studies on alternative knowledge of marginalized women

Although this thesis has focused specifically on Iraqi women's alternative knowledge in relation to US hegemonic knowledge, it has greater relevance to other marginalized women's contexts. The findings of this study have ramifications, both in methodological approach and in the generation of new material, for scholars working within the field of IR, especially Feminist IR. It is intended to constitute a call for at least a partial revision of how we approach the representation of marginalized women, and more specifically, how we theorise agency and positionality.

I shall offer insights into how my methodological approaches can benefit other studies which examine representations of marginalized women. My project has demonstrated that methodology matters, as it can yield very different results depending on what sets of approaches one takes. It is much less fruitful to prioritize dominant knowledge, if we are concerned about highlighting women's voices, as prioritizing dominant knowledge could lead us to regurgitating this dominant knowledge and 'speaking for women'.

For example, scholars attempting to prove that Muslim women are victims of US narratives do not necessarily liberate them from any victimization produced by US narratives, and so the argument becomes circular and reductive. To break this logic, we must operate from a different domain of knowledge by producing alternative knowledge.

Prioritizing alternative knowledge can help scholars minimize assumptions made about other women by paying attention to context:

Some themes like good wins over evil are common to many narratives but the way in which elements are ordered produces the aspects of a particular story, provides specific nuances of its meaning, and makes it distinguishable from all others. It is at the story level also that culturally specific, generalized knowledge begins to enter the interpretation, often producing (but at times also correcting) representational bias (Wibben, 2016, p. 63).

An important framework to help us encapsulate alternative knowledge is a narrative approach, as it helps produce new meaning and enables the individual to be the central focus of study rather than peripheral or absent:

narratives can be seen as “meaning-constructing activities,” instead of ‘meaning preserving’ ones. When one constructs a (semi)coherent story, certain meaning is imposed on the series of events and their connections. This meaning emerges through the act of narrating; it does not exist as some sort of pre-determined mold into which the events are poured. This is not to claim that the events did not mean certain things when they were experienced. However, the process of making connections, of developing a plot (or many plots) in a narrative of one’s life, fashions new meanings to these events—meanings that make sense within that narrative. The spoken story must also be seen as an act of writing—and therewith invention—of not only the narrative, but also of the self as: character in narrative (textualized subject), and narrator. This story is constructed within many different relations of power (Stern-Pettersson, 1998, p. 6).

I have demonstrated that studying alternative knowledge has challenged US hegemonic knowledge, as women’s narratives capture pluralistic meanings that open up different interpretations into how marginalized women perceive their representations, and thereby destabilize hegemonic knowledge.

The danger of homogenizing marginalized women must be taken more seriously. This is because homogenizing marginalized women perpetuates epistemic violence as it violently precludes women from expressing their agency. We must recognize that epistemic violence not only operates on the

level of discourse but can also progress into other forms of violence. As Dana Cloud (2004, p. 300) notes:

[The (mis) representations of Muslims] encouraged consent to repressive violence in the domestic arena (the policing of Arabs, Muslims, and dissenters under the Patriot Act) as well as abroad in acts of outright brutality that resulted in the deaths of many thousands of innocents.

My thesis has demonstrated that it is important to address epistemic violence by enabling women to express their agency and explore the extent to which epistemic violence has impacted their lived experiences. An effective way to combat epistemic violence caused by hegemonic knowledge is recognize the value of women's perspectives and experiences:

epistemic practices (how we construct and disseminate knowledge) profoundly shape our understandings of events and issues—therefore our capabilities to address them. It is not enough, however, to simply argue that the 'feminist war' frame had these effects, but it is important to 'trace the ideological and material consequences of such representations' (Wibben, 2016, p. 71).

Tracing the ideological and material consequences of marginalized women's representations can draw out the links between different types of violence: 'epistemic, physical, and structural violence shaping women's lives' (Wibben, 2016, p. 71). Therefore, the study of epistemic violence should not be considered as an isolated instance but as forming part of a 'continuum of violence'.

The case for more studies to consider alternative knowledge becomes apparent when considering the current political climate in the US and the portrayal of Muslim women under the Presidency of Donald Trump:

President Donald Trump has also drawn upon the image of the oppressed Muslim woman to justify further intervention in Iraq and Syria. In his 2016 speech entitled "Understanding the Threat: Radical Islam and the Age of Terror," Trump spoke of the "oppression of women . . . in many Muslim nations," highlighting the practice of honour killings in Pakistan, but also suggesting that the practice has "reached our own shores." These ideas were likely employed to shame President Obama for failing to have a stronger military presence in the Middle East and North Africa, which he seemed to equate with protecting Muslim women. President Trump has suggested policies like reinvading Iraq to keep the oil, indicating that his concern for Muslim women seems to be a thin veneer beneath which lies the same desire for plunder which has often

motivated representations of Muslim woman as helpless. Earlier in the campaign, Trump had drawn criticism for insinuating that Ghazala Khan, the mother of a slain Muslim-American soldier, was forbidden from speaking by her husband when they stood on stage at the Democratic National Convention (Markey, 2016, p. 1331).

These homogenizing representations of Muslims are not just empty rhetoric—they have been institutionalized. Further, the ways in which scholars have discussed representations is reminiscent of studies that considered Muslim women's portrayal in the context of 'War on Terror':

In the United States, the two executive orders (EO) Donald Trump signed soon after his inauguration in 2017 officially sanctioned and legitimized discourse and policy against Muslims. Thinly disguised as actions that would give the government time to review and strengthen already very stringent policies regarding visas of tourists, immigrants, and refugees, the EOs clearly target Muslims, cast them as security threats, and attempt to implement Trump's campaign promise for a complete "Muslim ban." The anti-Muslim discourse and actions rely on and reproduce deeply gendered stereotypes about Muslims and Islam by depicting all Muslim men as potential terrorists, Muslim women as helpless victims of oppression, and Islam as inherently tyrannical, violent, and patriarchal (Gökarıksel, 2017, p. 469).

It is not just the US that has portrayed marginalized women and men in reductive terms. If we turn our attention to Europe, we notice that refugees specifically are being represented in a reductive gendered and racialized manner:

the claim that the Syrian refugees are primarily male is often repeated on #refugeesnotwelcome through images of men with text highlighting the absence of women and children. This emphasis on visual displays of male refugees is particularly strong following the extreme spread of images of drowned children on European beaches in august and September 2015. In contrast to mainstream media coverage of the war against Afghanistan and Iraq, in which the war was justified in part through an explicit focus on images of oppressed women, on #refugeesnotwelcome women are less visible. However, this lack of visibility operates in a similar way to highlight the desertion of women in the geographic location that the refugees are fleeing from, thus reaffirming the notion that Muslim nations are places where there are oppressed women to be rescued (Rettberg, 2016, p. 17).

Scholars continue to prioritize hegemonic knowledge. While it is important to highlight this, doing this alone leads us to make assumptions about

women's agency. Instead, women need to be offered a platform to express their own concerns and agencies. Therefore, studying the narratives of Syrian refugees as well as other refugees is needed. In particular, studying their lived experiences in relation to Western hegemonic knowledge allows us to highlight convergences and divergences between the two sets of knowledge as a way of breaking down binaries.

My project has also pointed to the need for more studies to look into the precarious situation of Iraqi female refugees. It is clear that almost fifteen years after the US-led 2003 invasion, there is a lack of peace, and the situation of Iraqi refugees in Jordan has not improved (given their lack of refugee status). When thinking of ways to develop the work on Iraqi women's situations, Al-Ali and Pratt (2016, pp. 22–34) invite us to consider achieving peace and demanding more for women's rights in a critical way:

Given our findings on Iraq, real peace cannot be achieved without an end to the global and local inequalities that are linked to imperialism, neoliberalism, authoritarianism, and militarism. A legalistic focus on rights or gender quotas, as happened under the US occupation of Iraq, allows politicians to give lip service to 'women's rights', whilst ignoring whether such measures lead to tangible improvements for women on the ground.

This demonstrates there is a need for more studies that focus on women's narratives, rather than just statistics about their situation. New studies of women's narratives would help us understand how women perceive insecurity and reveal their own agency in addressing insecurity. Future studies examining marginalized people should not only focus on victim narratives but also highlight their agency as a necessary tool for countering hegemonic knowledge about them.

Studies which examine the lives of women in conflict situations continues to be marginalized in mainstream IR. As recent as 2016, feminist scholars continue to call for more studies that theorize and take seriously the role of gender and women in the relation to the war on terror and its aftermath:

There is now a rapidly growing body of literature examining the development, motivation, and effects of this US-led aggression [...] However, what is virtually absent from these accounts is an examination of the central role that gender, as it intersects with other identities such as race, class, sexuality, nationality and religion, plays in the war on terror. In part, this reflects the conventional way of thinking about international relations, in general, and wars, in particular. That is, states, state leaders, militaries, international organizations, global capitalists and, in this particular case, transnational terrorist organizations, are assumed

to be the most important actors in international conflicts. Women, when and if they appear, are typically represented as being acted upon rather than as actors themselves. In terms of the war on terror, we can see this in portrayals of women as casualties of the 9/11 attacks, mothers of fallen soldiers, victims of repressive dictators, and widows rebuilding their lives in the aftermath of war. (Hunt & Rygiel, 2016, p.1)

We need to amplify a range of different voices in order to address power imbalances. Hunt & Rygiel's argument about highlighting women's experiences has implications for how we think about Security Studies and International politics. My project has demonstrated how women's narratives of security and agency complicate conventional understanding of security, in part because of the difficulties of conceiving security in abstract terms. I demonstrated that not all women's needs were being accurately addressed by the home or host governments. Since each woman had a different definition of what it meant to feel secure, ideas of security need to embody a more personal approach to security. These findings have relevance for scholars researching marginalized women in post-conflict situations, as one prominent example. We must continue to challenge the often abstract ideas of security and realist paradigms of mainstream IR, which have undervalued the lived experiences of women in shaping global politics.

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Appendix: Biographical accounts

It was very important for the project to include these biographies regardless of length, in order to provide as much background context on the lives of the women who have shared their stories about the 2003 US-led conflict of Iraq.

Shayma

Shayma was born in Maysan, Iraq on the 29th of July 1965 to a writer and a housewife. Iraq remains her place of residence. She is married with six children and is an avowed Sunni devotee.

Shayma completed a diploma in accounting and currently works as a feminist activist (Na'shita Nisawiya). She is head of the first feminist organisation—focusing primarily on women's interests and spreading democracy—in her district. Shayma met some US officials during the occupation to discuss the writing of the constitution and the mechanisms of Iraqi democracy. She is still in touch with US officials who were stationed in her place of residence, Al Kut.

Dalal

Dalal was born in Amarah, Iraq on the 29th of June 1978 to a housewife and a water and sewage worker. She left Iraq to seek refuge in Jordan on the 19th of March 2015. Dalal does not plan on returning to Iraq, as she fears for her life. She is single and describes her religious affiliation as Sabaeen. Dalal did not go to university and is currently unemployed.

Khadeeja

Khadeeja was born in Amarah, Iraq on the 7th of January 1989 to a housewife and a water and sewage worker. Like her sister Dalal, Khadeeja left Iraq on the 19th of March 2015 to seek refuge in Jordan. Khadeeja does not plan to return to Iraq as she deems the level of terrorism too high. She has also received anonymous death threats. Khadeeja is single and describes herself as a moderate Sabaeen. She studied to high school level and is unemployed.

Sameera

Sameera was born in Mosul, Iraq on the 18th of August 1970 to a timber merchant and a housewife, who Sameera said had managed to complete her

primary education. Troubled by the war, Sameera decided to leave Iraq. She moved to Syria for 8 months before settling in Jordan where she is currently based. She is married with three children. Sameera describes herself as a religious Sunni but sees no difference between different sects. Sameera herself obtained a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Mosul. She is currently without an official job, as Iraqis are not permitted to work in Jordan; instead she works secretly for a charity supporting refugee Iraqi families.

Christina

Christina was born in Kirkush, Iraq in 1945 to a housewife and a farmer. Her father passed away when she was aged 3. She left Iraq on the 19th of August 2014 to seek a safe haven in Jordan. Christina does not plan to return to Iraq. She lost her home and belongings around the time when Daesh appeared, and thus has nowhere to return to. She describes herself as a religious Christian. Christina is married with seven children. She completed a diploma in teaching and is now retired.

Aisha

Aisha was born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1979 to a housewife and an electrician. She currently resides in Jordan. She has not attended university and is currently unemployed. She is married with three children. Aisha describes herself as a religious Sunni.

Hajjar

Hajjar was born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1975 to a housewife and accountant. Hajjar now resides in Jordan. She is married with five children. Hajjar belongs to the Sunni sect of Islam. Hajjar has not completed a university degree but undertook training in healthcare and human development. She works as a social researcher in health. She also works for a charity supporting Iraqi refugee families.

Kawther

Kawther was born in Al-Qadisiya, Iraq in 1973. Her father is retired, and her mother is a housewife. Kawther left Iraq for Syria in 2007, and then on the 25th of December 2014 settled in Jordan. She has no plans to return to Iraq, as the current situation is unstable. Kawther is married with three boys and four girls. She describes herself as a Sabaeen devotee. Kawther has not attended university. She is unemployed in Jordan.

Zainab

Zainab was born in Mosul, Iraq in 1965. Her father is deceased, and her mother is a housewife. Zainab studied Chemistry at Mosul University. She left Iraq in 2007 and lived in Syria for five to six years before settling in Jordan. She plans to return to Iraq but is waiting for the situation in Iraq to stabilise. She is a housewife and a mother of four boys and two girls.

Samantha

Samantha was born in Kirkush, Iraq in 1975 to two teachers. She left Iraq on the 18th of August 2014 to reside in Jordan. She describes herself as a religious Christian. She is unmarried. She studied Biology at the University of Mosul. She used to work for the health ministry in Iraq but is currently unemployed in Jordan.

Tala

Tala was born on the 2nd of May 1980 in Baghdad but lived in Nasiriyah, Iraq. Her mother is a housewife and her father are a teacher. She has not completed a university degree. However, Tala has her own small business sewing clothes at home and she also works in a salon. She describes herself as a religious Sunni who fulfils her religious obligations such as praying and fasting. Tala mentioned that she has been twice married. Her oldest daughter (from her previous marriage) is married and still resides in Iraq. Tala has three children from her second husband. She does not plan to return to Iraq but instead would like to migrate to the US with her family in order to join her two brothers who reside there.

Hanady

Hanady was born in Basra on the 30th of April 1948. She has a son who passed away, three daughters and nine grandchildren. She describes herself as a religious Sunni. Her dad worked on formalities for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He worked his way up until he became an ambassador. He retired in 1960. Her mother is a housewife. The nature of her father's work meant that Hanady had to move countries every three years and so pursuing a higher education was never her focus. She completed her GCSEs but did not go to university as she married at 18. Her husband decided to study in England during which time she undertook a Secretarial and Administration course and managed to find work.

Hanady worked at French company based in Iraq for 14 years. She is currently involved in humanitarian work. She set up a charity five years ago when she first noticed that the number Iraqi refugees in Jordan had increased and were in need for support, such as providing food, livestock or

help with paying off their medical operations. Many have been struck by cancer resulting from the weapons that have been used in Iraq, and she thinks the problem is spreading amongst adults and children. The price of treatment in Jordan is exorbitant. Thus, she began launching appeals online. She received funds from donors which she then distributes amongst deprived individuals. She settled in Jordan in 2004 after having lived in approximately ten different countries. Hanady does not intend to return to Iraq.

Abeer

Abeer was born in 1970 in Iraq to parents who were both teachers. She obtained a degree in Administration from the University of Baghdad. She is unemployed in Jordan, but when she lived in Iraq she used to teach at an Academy. She describes herself as somewhat religious, emphasizing that she is not overly religious. She comes from a mixed religious background: her father is Sunni and her mother are Shia. She is married to a university professor and has three children, two girls and a boy. She left Iraq in 2009 and lived in Libya for four years before settling. At present, she has no plans to return to Iraq. However, if the situation in Iraq improves, she would be willing to move back to Iraq.

Shatha

Shatha was born in Baghdad in 1992 to a mother who works in humanitarian aid and a father who works in the pastry industry. She studied genetic engineering at the University of Philadelphia in Jordan and is currently unemployed. She describes herself a religious Sunni. She left Iraq in 2007. Based on the current situation, she has no plans to return to Iraq because of the lack of safety. If the situation improves, she will '100% return to Iraq'.

Ruby

Ruby was born in Mosul in 1977. Her mother is a housewife and father are retired. She studied medicine at the University of Mosul. She currently does not work in Jordan but in Iraq. She worked as a doctor in Al-hamdaniya hospital and worked at a clinic in the afternoons. Ruby described herself as a deeply devout Christian and even has said 'a person without religion has no worth'. She is married and has four girls and a boy.

She left Iraq on the 18th of August 2014 and has never lived in another country prior to moving to Jordan. She told me that she definitely does not want to return to Iraq. Her goal at the moment is to immigrate to reunite with her husband in Melbourne, Australia.

Iman

Iman was born in Jordan in 1988. Her father is the delegate minister of Arab Universities but is now retired. Her mother runs a school. Iman studied marketing at Al Zaytoonah University in Jordan, which is a private institute. She currently works as a teacher at her mother's school. She describes herself as Muslim and does not affiliate herself with any sect of Islam.

Iman never lived in Iraq, but she visited the country once or twice a year. She mentioned that she never lived anywhere other than Jordan. Her parents moved to Jordan in 1979 as their work was based in Jordan and they decided to settle here. However, she would still consider moving to Iraq if the situation in Iraq improves.

Bushra

Bushra was born in Baghdad in 1976. Her father is an engineer who used to work for the government and her mother worked for the ministry of planning. She never completed her secondary school education and is currently unemployed. She describes herself as a moderate Shi'a although she does not like announcing it. She is married and is a mother of two boys and two girls. She left Iraq in 2001 with her family and has no current plans to return to Iraq, although she might in the future.

Asra

Asra was born in Baghdad in 1973. Her father is a soldier in the Iraqi army and her mother is an elementary school teacher who teaches religion, Islamic studies and maths. Asra completed a diploma in teaching but is currently unemployed in Jordan. She describes herself as a religious Sunni. Asra is married with three daughters and a son.

Asra left Iraq in 2007. She intends to errantly return to Iraq once the situation improves. In fact, during the interview, she was very happy to mention that she will be visiting Baghdad the day after our interview, giving her some hope for a safer Iraq.

Ebithal

Ebithal was born in Iraq in 1961. She is married with children and holds a PhD in Media and Communications. She currently does not work in Jordan, but in Iraq she used to be a Public Relations manager. She has experience working with Americans at a media station. She has no plans to return to

Iraq and is considering migrating to the US, as she has been told that life in the US is comfortable and they take care of seniors and ill people.